PA 3827.A27
Four plays of cen
3 0081 001 631 435

Central Library
JOINT UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
NASHVILLE TENNESSEE

Lacy Lockert Collection

PA
3827
.A27

853325

JUL-0257

DATE DUE

RETURNED			
APR 1 0 1990			
MAR 2 9 1990			
OCT 25 2002			
RET'D NOV 0 1 2002			

DEMCO NO. 38-298

FOUR PLAYS OF AESCHYLUS

BY THE AUTHOR OF THESE TRANSLATIONS

'DENYS OF AUXERRE'

A DRAMA IN VERSE

'Such a mastery of fine style as can come only from the genuine emotion of great things deeply felt.'—TIMES.

'A poet of true fervour, sincere inspiration and uncommon technical accomplishment.'—DAILY TELEGRAPH.

'It abounds in passages of real lyrical beauty, and we come here and there, not very rarely, on lines which haunt the memory.'—IRISH TIMES.

CHRISTOPHERS, 22 Berners Street, W.C.

FOUR PLAYS OF AESCHYLUS

THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS ⁂ THE PERSIANS ⁂ THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES ⁂ PROMETHEUS BOUND

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE BY

G. M. COOKSON

OXFORD · BASIL BLACKWELL · BROAD STREET

MD · CCCC · XXII

New York
Chas. H. Daniels
49 West 55th Street

HOLYWELL PRESS, OXFORD

JOINT UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
NASHVILLE, TENN.

TO

PROFESSOR CHARLES EDWYN VAUGHAN

THE GOOD GENIUS THAT SHONE UPON MY YOUTH

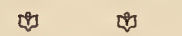
AND SHOWED ME THE GLORY OF GREAT

LITERATURE

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS	1
THE PERSIANS	58
THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES ..	110
PROMETHEUS BOUND	162

The Suppliant Maidens



Scene: *Argos. A hill rises in the foreground, and on the summit of it stand altars and statues of many gods.* Enter *the fifty* Danaides, *with their slave girls, and* Danaus.

Chorus.

Zeus, the Suppliant's God, be gracious to us,
Pitifully behold us, for fugitives are we;
Where the blown sand-dunes silt the mouths of Nilus,
There we took the highway of the blue, salt sea;
There looked our last at the land of Zeus, her borders
Lapsed and lost in the Syrian marches wild,
Fleeing, not as outlaws banned for blood-guilt
Lest a people perish, but self-exiled.
No way but this to escape abhorred embraces,
Marriage rites unholy that true love shuns;
Better far lands and unfamiliar faces
Than wedded and bedded with King Ægyptus' sons.
As when hard pressed on the board a cautious player
This piece or that from a threatened square withdraws,
One move seemed best unto Danaus our father,
Counsel-in-chief and leader of our cause;
One woe to suffer—and that the noblest sorrow,
Seeing we were compassed in on every hand,—

Tarrying not, with the fleeting ocean billow
To fly till our keel touched the Argive strand,
Whence we boast ourselves sprung, from the breath of
Zeus' nostrils,
And the touch of his procreant finger laid,
For a dynasty's founding, on a king's daughter,
Even the gnat-tormented heifer-maid.
What land but this would offer us a haven,
Where else the world o'er should we welcome find,
Having no arms but the suppliant's feeble weapons,
Boughs from the woodland plucked with white wool
twined?
Realm, broad realm, brown land and sparkling water,
Gods of the sky and holy ones of earth,
Denizens of darkness that visit men with vengeance,
And in that Triad last named but chief in worth,
Zeus, the Protector of travel-weary pilgrims,
Keeper of the threshold never crossed by crime,
Send soft airs to greet our maiden meinie,
Winds of welcome blowing from a sweet, calm clime.
But the ungodly sons of King Ægyptus,
Bulls of the herd, ere they trample this fair ground,—
Loamy levels, tilth and fallow land and pasture,—
Far over ocean with their swift ship hound!
There let them meet with thunder-blast and lightning,
Wrath of leaping seas and spite of storm-swept rain;
There let destruction find them when rough winter
Looses the lash of the loud hurricane;
Ere they climb loth beds to make of us their minions,
Minions of their pleasure and playthings of their pride;
So kindred blood shall not serve to cool brute passion
Not by sweet exchange of hearts sanctified.

Youngling divine, I hail thee now,
From beyond the sea thine aid I invoke;
Son flower-fed of the Mother Cow,
Quick with Zeus' breath and his handstroke.
So of the dam with hoof and horn
And enchanted body a babe was born,
Man-child made for mortal lot,
Epaphus, the touch-begot.

The naming of thee where long ago
Our Mother roamed this pastoral earth,
And the calling to mind of a vanished woe
Shall bear witness in trials of later birth;
And more sorrow yet may come into ken,
Though we know not how and we guess not when,
Like ours of to-day and hers of old;
And these at long last shall Time unfold.

To one that watcheth the wild birds winging,
Here at ease in his native bower,
The suppliant song of an alien race
Chance-heard, shall seem as the sweet, sad singing
Of Tereus' Daulian paramour,
The nightingale hidden, the hawk in chase.

Spring and summer for sorrow she grieveth
Under the green leaves weeping her pain
And the life that was passed in homelessness:
Spring and summer the story she weaveth
Of the child she bore by her own hand slain,
And the wrath of a mother pitiless.

I as the nightingale passioning for sorrow
To Ionian music tune my pipe,
And these soft cheeks feel the rain-worn furrow
That on Nilus' bank grew round and ripe:
For my heart hath learnt the meaning of tears,
And I fill my lap with blossoms pale
Gathered with grief in the wood of wail,
The better to hush these brooding fears
That are fain to know to what end I fare
From the land that lies dim in dust-veiled air,
If there be any who hearkens or hears.

Nay, but ye Gods of the bride-bed and begetting,
Hear me! Ye should be jealous for the Right!
Grudge lawless youth, with the hot blood fretting,
Lore that perfects passion's neophyte!
Set the brand of your scorn on lust that profanes,
And mingle love's rite with austerities sweet!
What is fiercer than war? Yet for war-weary feet
There standeth an altar, no sacrilege stains:
To what-so wight would from battle-carnage flee,
A refuge awe owns and a court of deity,
Where red-handed Havoc halts and refrains.

Saith the wise saw of old,
'The purpose Zeus doth hold
Next to his heart no hunter brings to bay.'
All Being in his sight
Flows in the main of light,
The mirrored glory of his perfect day,
Where man the babbler with vain lips
Sees but the secular dark of unrelieved eclipse.

The thing that he hath wrought
With brow-nod of calm thought
Fallen, stands fast, and, grappled, is not thrown.
His counsels tread the maze
Of labyrinthine ways
Through quicks, through glooms with umbrage overgrown;
And in that covert dark and shy
Bold riders check the rein, foiled is the keenest cry.

From towered bastions
Of Hope he plucks Time's sons
And tosses them to ruin. If one brace
The mettle weariless
Of Gods for his duress,
Pride pays with penal pangs, though throned in the holy place.

So let him mark afresh
How froward is this flesh,
How the polled trunk for lust of me doth grow
With many a stubborn shoot;
How pricks to mad pursuit
The unremitting goad, a curse, a cheat, a woe.

So to music impassioned,
Sung high, sung low,
With tears I have fashioned
Untuneable woe.
Alack! 'tis like mourner's grieving.

So sadly my quick spirit graces
With groanings of death griefs that live,
And I cry unto Apia's high places
My broken speech to forgive,
And falling down on my linen veil
I mar with rents its fabric frail,
Tissue of Sidon's weaving.

With amplest oblation
To high heaven we come,
For hope's consummation,
When death's wind is dumb;
But alack! for the woes dark-heaving,
The billow whose path none traces,
Nor what strand on its crest I shall reach!
I cry unto Apia's high places
To forgive my broken speech,
And falling oft on my linen veil
I rend and mar its fabric frail,
Tissue of Sidon's weaving.

Thus far the oar right well hath sped;
And the bark flax-sewn to fend salt seas,
With never a flaw in the following breeze
Nor winter storm to dread,
Hath constant been as my prayers and vows:
And I pray the Father that all doth scan,
Here on firm earth, that he may send
To well-begun a happy end;
So I, that seed am of his spouse
August, may flee the embrace of man
And live unlorded and unwed.

Zeus' daughter, vowed to maidenhead,
Look with a loving eye on me,
That would keep chaste and pure as she,
Whose virgin arm the arrow sped
And slew the Hunter in his lust
Whom Opis tremblingly outran!
O maid unwon, a maiden grace
With all thy power in this sore chase,
That I, the seed of Zeus' spouse august,
May flee the violence of man
And live unlorded and unwed.

But, if these will not, then I will essay
The sun-loathed courts of Death,
Where never a sick soul is turned away
That wearies of this breath;
And, since Olympian Gods no help afford,
My corpse shall access find to Zeus, Earth's Lord,
When suppliant boughs shall be decked with the knotted cord.

Ah! Mother Io, thee wroth Gods amerce:
And of the courts celestial I know
That there dwell jealous wives who hate and curse;
For waves run high when breezes stiffly blow.

Then Right and Wrong shall be unreconciled;
And Justice shall upbraid
Zeus, that he honoured not the heifer's child,
Whom once of old he made,
If that at this late hour of time his eye
Be turnéd back when his own offspring cry:

Yet, when we call, he hears—he hears though throned
on high.

Ah! Mother Io, thee wroth Gods amerce:
And of the courts celestial I know
That there dwell jealous wives who hate and curse!
For waves run high when breezes stiffly blow.

[*During the preceding chorus* DANAUS *has climbed to the top of the hill.*]

DANAUS.

Children, ye must be wise and circumspect:
Remember, a wise judgment holp ye hither,
With eld for pilot, safe and fatherly,
Across unruly seas. And here on land
I will take thought for you and keep you safe,
If ye set down my words in your heart's tables.
Far off I can discern a cloud of dust,
Ever the voiceless courier of hosts,
Before the noise of wheels reacheth the ear,
When axles pipe unheard. I can distinguish
An armèd mass, with shields and tossing spears,
Horses and chariots of war recurved.
'Tis likely that the Princes of this land
Have heard of us from messengers and come
To be their own intelligencers. Whether
They mean no harm, or sharp resentment speeds
This stern array, all things concur herein;
That ye, fair daughters, make this hill your seat;
Dear is it to the gods of festival,
Pastime and sport and peaceful rivalries.
More strong than castle tower an altar stands,
A buckler inexpugnably secure.

Then with all speed ascend; and with you take
In solemn ceremonial your wands
Wound with white favours that appeal to Zeus,
The God of Mercy. To these foreign lords
Answering in such wise as shall move their mercy,
With lamentations and all forms of speech
Proper to your necessity, and fit
For strangers in a strange land, plainly tell
The story of your flight, and how from blood
'Tis wholly free. Let nought of boldness wait
On your discourse: nothing of light or vain
Be seen, but downward looks, untroubled eyes:
Not forward in the telling of your tale,
Nor hanging back: 'tis easy to offend
The race that dwelleth here. Never forget
Your cue is to submit: ye come as poor
And needy suitors, aliens and exiles.
Bold speech consorts not with the weaker side.

CHORUS.

Father, thy cautions find us well disposed
To prudent counsels, and thy wise precepts
I shall with all solicitude obey.
Zeus, our progenitor, watch over us.

DANAUS.

Stay not: lay hold upon the means at hand.

CHORUS.

I will be with you instantly. O Zeus,
Pity us, or we perish.

[*They ascend the hill.*]

DANAUS.

May he look
Graciously on us: if it pleases him,
All will be well. Call now upon this child
Of Zeus.

CHORUS.

I call upon the radiant Sun,
The saving source of health, to heal our woes,
And pure Apollo once exiled from heaven;
God though he is, he knows this earthly lot,
And feels perhaps for frail mortality.

DANAUS.

May he in very deed commiserate
And stand a ready helper by our side.

CHORUS.

Which of these Gods shall I next invoke?

DANAUS.

I see
The trident of the Isthmian King.

DANAUS.

He gave
Fair passage to our vessel: welcome fair
May he accord on land.

DANAUS.

And here is Hermes,
After the way the Hellenes fashion him.

CHORUS.

Well met indeed: I pray that he may prove
A herald of glad tidings.

DANAUS.

Bend in awe
And adoration at the common altar
Of all these sovereignties. On holy ground
Crouch like a flock of doves that fear the hawk
For all his cousinship of wings. Even so
Fearful are ye of foes of your own blood
That would pollute your race. And if one fowl
Prey on another, how can it be pure?
And he who weds a bride against her will,
Her father not consenting, where shall he
Find purity? I trow, that when he's dead
The doer of this deed at Hades' bar
Shall stand arraigned not idly: even there,
So we believe, another Zeus holds court
Among the souls whose earthly race is run,
And passes final sentence on their crimes.
Look to yourselves, and to this lord return
Such answer, that ye fail not in your cause.

Enter KING.

KING.

What little band is this that I salute?
Whence come ye, not, as Hellenes are, attired,
But with barbaric bravery of robes,
And fine veils finished with the weaver's spathe?
These woman's weeds are not of Argolis
Nor any part of Hellas. Herald ye
Have none; nor minister to be your friend;
Nor guide in a strange land. And how ye dared
Adventure here, thus utterly forlorn,
Is matter for amazement. By your side

Before these Gods of Festival are laid
Branches that well accord with suppliant's law.
In Hellas that surmise confirms itself:
Fair dealing must conjecture all the rest,
Were there no living voice to clear the doubt.

CHORUS.

Touching our garb thy words are words of truth:
But how shall I address thee? Art thou one
Of the commonalty? Com'st with formal wand
Equipped for parle? Or as of this fair realm
Foremost and chief?

KING.

Let not that vex thy heart:
Thou may'st with full assurance answer me.
I am the son of Palaechthon earth-born,
Pelasgus, of this soil the supreme lord.
And they who reap its fruits from me their king
Are called, with reason good, Pelasgians.
Over all ground towards the setting sun,
Wherethrough the Haliacmon flows, I reign.
Within my borders I include the land
Of the Perrhaebi, and the parts beyond
Pindus, adjoining the Chaonians,
With the high mountains of Dodona; west
I touch the salt, wet frontiers of the sea.
Thence all that stretches hitherward is mine,
The spot whereon we stand being Apia,
So called of old from one in medicine wise,
Apis, Apollo's son, prophet and healer,
Who from Naupactus crossed, beyond the gulf,
And purged this land of man-devouring beasts,

Which Earth, by bloody deeds done long ago,
Polluted and estranged, in mood most like
A step-dame, gendered, to dispute her soil
With man, his fanged and serpent brood-fellow.
For these did Apis on this Argive ground,
To its no small relief, with shredded herbs
And wholesome charms effect a perfect cure,
His fee, to be remembered in our prayers.
But, now that I have answered you, 'twere well
If one of ye declared what birth ye boast,
With brevity and clearness: this my realm
Hath little liking for long-drawn discourse.

CHORUS.

Briefly and clearly then: Of Argive blood
We boast to be: the mother of our race
A cow made happy in the son she bare.
And I will fix upon this frame of truth
Its proper parts until the whole cohere.

KING.

Women—strange women, ye compose a tale
Not credible. How can ye be of Argive blood,
More like to Libyans than our womankind?
Yea, such a plant might grow on Nilus' bank;
Methinks, these forms were coined in Cyprian mint
Struck to the life by your progenitors.
Stay: I have heard that nomads of your sex,
Horsed upon camels ride in cushioned selles
Along the coasts of Æthiopia:
They should resemble ye; or, on my life,
Had ye but bows I could have ta'en an oath
That ye were the unlorded Amazons

That fare on flesh. Ye must instruct me further;
I am to know more of this history
And how ye are a seed of Argive strain.

CHORUS.

Runs not the story that on Argos' earth
Io once kept the keys of Hera's house?

KING.

'Tis very sure she did: the fame thereof
Lives yet throughout the land.

CHORUS.

And more by token;
The heart of Zeus was stung with love of her?

KING.

Troth, 'twas no secret: Hera wrought amain
To foil his fancy.

CHORUS.

And this royal quarrel
How doth it end in the story?

KING.

The Argive goddess
Transformed the maid into a cow.

CHORUS.

And Zeus
Is fain to have the comely beast fair-horned?

KING.

Indeed the tale is told so: to that end
He wore the likeness of a lustful bull.

CHORUS.

What counter-stroke to this dealt Zeus' haught Queen?

KING.

Why, then she found a keeper for the cow,
Him that hath eyes which look all ways at once.

CHORUS.

And what was he, this all-beholding one,
Sole neatherd of a solitary cow?

KING.

Argus, earth's child, the same that Hermes slew.

CHORUS.

And the device that followed? What thing else
Prepared she for the heifer heaven-accursed?

KING.

She did afflict her with the gnat that stings,
A drover's goad-prick to stampeding kine.

CHORUS.

They call him 'Gad-fly' on the banks of Nile.

KING.

What? Did he drive her forth from her own land
As far as Nile?

CHORUS.

He did so: and thy tale
Tallies in each particular with mine.

KING.

And is it true then that she reached Canopus
And Memphis far inland?

CHORUS.

Surely; and Zeus
By laying-on of hands raised up a son.

KING.

Who then is he that boasts himself the calf
Zeus gendered on this cow?

CHORUS.

Even Epaphus,
True title given from that divine caress.

KING.

And Epaphus—had he issue?

CHORUS.

He begat
Libya, the reaper of a third of earth,
Her amplest fields.

KING.

What scion sprang from her?

CHORUS.

My father's father, Bel, who had two sons.

KING.

Tell me, I pray, thy sire's all-sapient name.

CHORUS.

Danaus: he hath a brother who begot
Two score and ten sons.

KING.

Prithee, indulge me further;
And let me hear by what name he is called?

CHORUS.

Ægyptus. Now thou know'st my ancient line,
Stretch forth the hand of succour to raise up
Argives, that here have taken sanctuary.

KING.

Anciently, I do verily believe,
A common tie unites ye to this land.
But how had ye the courage to forsake
The house of your fathers? What so sore mischance
Hath fallen on ye?

CHORUS.

King of the Pelasgians!
Calamity is as a ruffling breeze
That glances through a thousand shifting forms;
Nor is there anywhere on earth a place
Where thou could'st point and say, 'Here sorrow's wing
Keeps darkly constant to its native hue.'
For which of us in fancy ever dreamed
Of this unlooked for flight; or that a ship
Whereon we sailed should touch this Argive strand
Wherewith we had affinity of old;
Or that in distant Egypt wedlock scorned,
Unhappied by the hymenaeal choir,
Should be the cause of consequence so strange?

KING.

What is the boon thou sayest thou dost crave
Here in the name of these Gods of festival,
Your branches fresh-plucked all with white enwound?

CHORUS.

That I may ne'er become bondslave and thrall
Unto Ægyptus' race.

KING.

And is it hate
That prompts thy plea, or reverence of law?

CHORUS.

Nay, who amongst their own blood kin would buy
Their lords and masters?

KING.

Yet it is a match
That makes for power.

CHORUS.

And if misfortune come
Who cares if wife so wed be put away?

KING.

What shall I do then that I may be found
To-you-ward a respecter of the Right?

CHORUS.

Refuse to yield us up to Ægyptus' sons
When they demand us of thee.

KING.

There thou broachest
Grave matters, that envisage dangerous war.

CHORUS.

Yet Justice champions those that fight for her.

KING.

If I had had my share in these events
From the beginning——

CHORUS.

O! Assume it now!
And, as 'twere, this high deck and laurelled poop
Of a most stately vessel honour duly.

KING.

Indeed, when I look round me and behold
This haunt of Gods all branched and shaded o'er,
I shudder.

CHORUS.

Where is he who would not pause?
The wrath of Zeus the Suppliant's God is heavy.

Stop not thine ears, O son of Palaechthon,
Nor hold thy heart aloof, thou royal man,
But hearken when I cry to thee, whose throne
Is over this wide realm Pelasgian.
Behold, in me a suppliant sues for grace,
A hunted thing still forced to shift her ground,
Like to a heifer with the wolves in chase
That to the herd doth lowingly complain
Upon some rocky precipice crag-bound,
Trusting his strength and telling him her pain.

KING.

Methinks I see this gathering of the Gods
Of festival, with branches freshly plucked
All shaded o'er, nodding in grave assent.
Oh, may your cause who claim to be our kin
Work us no mischief, nor on any hand
Strife grow from what we neither could foresee
Nor have provided for. That to this realm
Were an unwanted, a superfluous care.

CHORUS.

Law that doth vindicate the suppliant's right,
Daughter of Zeus who deals the destiny,
Look to it that I bring not in my flight
Mischief and wrong that wreck felicity.
And, thou with eld's too sober wisdom wise,
From younger hearts 'tis not too late to learn,
The noblest offering, purest sacrifice
On altars of oblation ever laid,
Sweeter than sweetest essence faith can burn,
Is mercy to the weak that ask for aid.

KING.

It is not at my private hearth ye sit;
And if some public mischief be afoot
Then must the commons of this realm work out
Such expiation as shall cleanse them all.
Myself might tender no effectual pledge
But with the privity of all free men.

CHORUS.

Thou art both liberty and law
And commonalty; thine
An absolute prerogative
No captious rights confine;
Thou rul'st the hearth place of thy land,
The Godhead's central shrine,
By an indisputable nod.
Sole-sceptred on thy throne
All business that concerns the state
Thou dost despatch alone.
Beware lest unregarded wrong
Let in contagion.

KING.

Contagion fall upon mine enemies.
Howbeit, to help thee and take myself
No hurt I scarce know how. Yet 'twere scant kindness
To set thy prayers at nought. Perplexity
And fears possess my heart, whether to act,
Or not to act and let fate have her way.

CHORUS.

Look up unto the Watcher set on high,
The Guardian of necessitous souls who sue,
Crouched on a neighbour's hearth, for sanctuary,
Craving in vain the right which is their due.
For grace denied and suppliants' slighted pleas
Endures the wrath of Zeus no pangs of guilt appease.

KING.

If by the law of the land Ægyptus' sons
Are your rightful lords, to wit, upon the plea
Of next-kin, who would choose resist their claim?
Your answer must be founded on the law
Domestic; and ye must maintain and prove
That over ye they have no power at all.

CHORUS.

Into the hands of tyrant man
God grant that I fall never:
I'll know no bounds but the starry span
That bends o'er earth for ever:
Fled to that virgin liberty
I'll live from forceful marriage free.
Be thou the ally of Justice and not Law;
Judge thou as judge the Gods and stand of them in awe.

KING.

No easy judgment: choose not me for judge.
Have I not said without the people's voice
I will not and I cannot, King though I be,
Do as thou'lt have me do? I will not hear—
If it should chance that aught untoward fall—
Reproachful commons cast it in my teeth
'To honour strangers thou didst wreck thy land!'

CHORUS.

Ancestral Zeus, of both blood-kin,
Eyes suppliant and pursuer:
The ponderable stuff of sin
Is charged to the wrong doer;
Quick is the tell-tale hand to mount
And reckon to the just's account
The fair record of righteousness.
Since equal is the poise why shrink from fair redress?

KING.

This asks deep thought: an eye within the mind,
Keen as a diver salving sunken freight,
To sink into the depths, yet, searching there,
Not lose itself in roving phantasies;
That all end well and mischief follow not
First for the State, which is our chief concern,
Then for ourselves; and neither war lay hold
On loot to pay your loss, nor by our act,
If from this seat of Gods that ye have made
Your seat, we yield you up, the land be crushed
By haunting visitations of the God
Whose business is destruction, Alastor,
The unforgetting instrument of wrath,

Who even in the house of Hades suffers not
The dead man to go free. And this asks not
Heart-searchings, fathom-deep, of saving thought?

CHORUS.

Search deep and then rise up more strong
For justice: be the minister
That reverentially protects from wrong
The stranger and the sojourner,
Resolved never to yield while thou stand'st by
An exile driven so far in godless outlawry.

O look not on till rapine come
And from these haunts of Powers divine
Hale me for spoil: all masterdom,
All judicature here are thine.
Then in this cause let thy decree go forth:
'Man's lusts here sue for judgment,' and beware of wrath.

Submit not to the sight
Of divine Justice set at naught by might,
And the rejected suppliant led away
From statues holy, as by bands of gold
A horse is led, while rough men lay
Rude hands upon my raiment's damask fold.

Thy seed and thy household
As thou art cruel or in mercy bold,
The exact measure of thy 'yea' or 'nay'
Eternal Law shall utterly requite.
O ponder well these things, and sway
The event as Zeus commands, who judgeth right.

KING.

Nay, I have pondered and my bark of thought
Strikes on this point of peril. There's no choice
But of two sides I must take arms 'gainst one,
And either were a war of magnitude.
Here then you have the naked shell: stark hull,
Triced on the stocks, all rivets driven home,
And all her timbers strained and drawn together,
As 'twere, with shipwright's winches. Once at sea
She's bound for loss before she comes to land.
When there is jettison of merchandize,
By the good grace of Zeus the Garnisher
More may be gotten, a full load to freight
A ship of deeper draught. And, if the tongue
Shoot wildly, for the wound that words inflict
Words will apply the remedy, a balm
For angry humours, spell and counterspell:
But, that there be no letting of the blood
Of kin, compels to earnest sacrifice,
And many victims unto many gods,
Where'er men ask of oracles, must fall,
Preservatives against calamity.
My entrance to this quarrel comes unsought
And every way 'tis to my own undoing.
I'd rather be a seer of little skill
Than deeply learned in prophesying ill:
So, though my judgment goes not with the prayer,
Out of these troubles Heaven send issue fair.

CHORUS.

Hear the conclusion, then, of my much speech
That meant to move your pity.

KING.

I have heard:
But speak: I mark thee closely.

CHORUS.

I have scarves
And girdles that hold up my raiment—

KING.

Why,
All women have them.

CHORUS.

Out of these I'll fashion
An ornament and excellent device
To keep mine honour safe.

KING.

Give thy words meaning:
What is it thou would'st say?

CHORUS.

Give us a pledge,
Plant on some ground of faith these feeble feet;
If not—

KING.

These gatherings, girdlings up of robes,
How shall they stead thee?

CHORUS.

They shall serve to deck
These shapes with votive tablets never yet
Hanged up on hallowed images.

KING.

A riddle!
The manner of this: expound.

CHORUS.

Incontinent
We'll hang ourselves upon these holy Gods.

KING.

Thy menace lays the lash across my heart.

CHORUS.

I see thou understand'st me: now have I
Opened thine eyes to clearer vision.

KING.

Yea,
Turn where I may, griefs ineluctable
Confront my sight: a multitude of ills
Comes on like a river: on this sea of ruin
I am embarked: the bottomless abyss
Below; around unnavigable waves;
And nowhere any harbour from distress.
If I shall fail towards you and not exact
This debt which is your right, ye threaten me
With such pollution, strain words how ye will,
Hyperbole cannot o'ershoot the mark.
And if I stand before the city wall
And try conclusions with Ægyptus' sons,
Your own blood kin, upon the field of battle,
For sake of women men must stain this earth
With blood: and were not that bitter expense
To charge myself withal? Yet there's no help
But I must hold in awe the wrath of Zeus
Who helpeth suppliants: the fear of him
Is for all flesh the highest fear. Now, therefore,
Thou venerable father of these maids,

Take in thy hands branches like these and lay them
On other altars of my country's Gods,
That of your coming all the citizens
May see a visible token: let not fall
One word of me: the commonalty loves
To cast reproach upon their rulers. But,
Looking thereon, pity may move some soul
With hatred for the wickedness of men
Banded against you; and the public heart
Be for your boughs more tender. 'Tis a trait
Common with men to entertain kind thoughts
Towards the weaker side.

DANAUS.

That we have found a friend
Pitiful and God-fearing we account
Worth many favours. Wilt thou grant one more
And with me send some native to this land
For escort and as guides, that we may find
The altars of the city deities
That stand before the temples, and the shrines
Of those more warlike that defend your keep?
The form that nature gave us is not yours,
Nor are we habited as ye are. Nile
Nourisheth other folk than Inachus.
Beware lest an unheedful confidence
Hereafter breed dismay. Men have ere now
Slain those that were their friends, not knowing it.

KING.

Go with this stranger, men: for he says well.
Show him the way to the town altars and
The seats of Gods. And look ye bruit it not

At cross-roads, that ye bring this seafarer
To sit upon the hearths of the Holy Ones.

[*Exit* DANAUS *with bodyguard.*]

CHORUS.

For him the word is spoken: let him go
Since thou commandest it. But what of me?
What shall I do, and where dost thou assign
For me a place of safety?

KING.

Leave thy branches
Where thou art now as a token of distress.

CHORUS.

I lay them where thy hand and tongue direct.

KING.

Now thou art free to walk about this smooth
And level lawn.

CHORUS.

This lawn where all may tread?
And how shall that protect me?

KING.

Be content:
'Tis not our purpose to expose thee here
A prey for birds.

CHORUS.

For birds? And what of foes
More dangerous than serpents?

KING.

Fair and softly!
Thou see'st I speak thee fair.

CHORUS.

It is not strange
That fear betray uneasiness.

KING.

Methinks
The awe of Kings exceedeth evermore
All fears beside.

CHORUS.

O cheer me with kind words!
And hearten me no less with gracious deeds.

KING.

Nay, but 'tis not for long that thy good sire
Hath left thee. I too leave thee for a while,
But 'tis to call our folk together, make
The commons thy good friends; and teach thy father
How he should speak to them. Tarry meantime,
Therefore, and with thy prayers prevail upon
The gods of the land to grant thy heart's desire.
I will depart hence and make good my words.
Persuasion and fair fortune follow us.

[*Exit* PELASGUS. *The* DANAIDES *descend on to the open lawn below the hill.*]

CHORUS.

King of Kings, among the Blest
In thy bliss the blessedest,
In thy power of all that are
Mighty, mightiest by far,
Happy Zeus, that prayer receive,
And the event our wish achieve.
Drive aloof the lusts of men;

With thy loathing visit them;
Plunge 'neath an empurpled sea
That embodied infamy
Pitched without and black within
With havoc and the purposed sin.
But the woman's cause espouse:
Think upon our storied house,
Tenderly the tale renewing
Of old love and eager wooing:
And our ancestress to be,
Woman, yet once dear to thee.
Ah, remember Long Ago,
Thou Comforter of Io's woe!
For we boast that we can trace
High as Zeus our ancient race:
Sojourners were we at birth;
This is home, this parent earth.

In the print flower-sweet
Of my mother's feet,
Behold, I have planted mine:
Where she stooped to feed
Knee-deep in the mead
That fattens the Argive kine:
And with her alway
To haunt and betray
The eye of the earthborn herd.
Far hence lies her road,
By the gadfly goad,
As a skiff with the oar-blade, spurred:
She must know the pain
Of a maddened brain

And wander through many races,
Till 'twixt either strand
Of the sundered land
A path through the billows she traces.

To the Asian shore
She must pass o'er,
And ever her onward leap
Of her coming tells
To the Phrygian fells
And the fleecy moorland sheep.
By street and tower
That Teuthras' power
Founded for Mysian men
In olden time,
She speeds; she must climb
Through Lydian gorge and glen;
And she must o'erleap
The Cilician steep,
And the wild Pamphylian mountains
No barrier
Shall be to her;
Till fed by eternal fountains,
Broad rivers glide
And her footsteps guide
Through a pleasant land and a mighty,
With all wealth crowned,
The fair, the renowned
Wheatland of Aphrodite.

And still she flew, a hunted thing,
Of Heaven's grace unpitied;
And in and out with darting sting

In dizzy reel and dazzling ring
The wingéd herdsman flitted.

She has reached at last Zeus' own demesne
That is to all Nature boon,
Green with the glow of the melting snow
And scorched by the Typhoon.

She has come to the tide that is deep and wide,
Untouched by the hand of disease;
Yea, to Nile's water King Inachus' daughter,
Hera's crazed Thyiad, flees.

Paled then all dwellers in that lea
With quaking fear a-cold:
Such hybrid shape they ne'er did see:
Half woman and half cow was she,
A monster to behold.

A freakish, eerie, elfin form,
Whose kind 'twere hard to tell;
If human, out of human shape
Tortured by some dread spell.

Ah, then to charm away her grief,
Who at long last relented,
And rested the far-wandered feet
Of Io, the gnat-tormented?

Even Zeus, Lord Paramount, whose reign
Expects no earthly tyrant's bloody doom;
He eased her of her pain
With sweet constraint from all enforcement free
And breathings of his love divinely mild.
Tears as of one half-reconciled

She shed—warm tears of bitter memory;
But, with that heavenly burthen in her womb,
Became the mother of a perfect child.

A happy, long-lived man was he;
Wherefore a voice went through that fertile earth,
'Behold in verity
This is the son of Zeus: this is the seed
He sowed: who else among the Gods had stayed
The crafty plots that Hera laid?
If thou should'st say, "Here is Zeus' very deed,
This is a child of heavenly birth,"
Clean to the centre shall thine arrow speed.'

What God to thee should I prefer
And by a title holier
Ask Justice? Thou, O King,
Our Father art; and thy right hand
Hath planted us in a strange land;
We are thine own offspring.

Thou great unmatched artificer,
In thy calm heart let memory stir
The pulse of vanished days,
O Zeus that art in all things blest,
And whatso'er thou purposest
None hinders nor gainsays.

Thou art no vassal on a throne;
No power that doth transcend thine own
To thee dictates the law;
Nor is there one in higher place
To whom thou turn'st a humble face,
Holding his seat in awe.

Art thou in labour with the pang
Of deeds whereon great issues hang,
  Behold, the accomplished fact!
Or if in words goes forth thy breath,
The mind that with them travaileth
  Converteth speech to act.

[*Enter* DANAUS.]

DANAUS.

Take courage, children: the people of the land
With sovran voice have cast their votes right well.

CHORUS.

Dear envoy! Best beloved of tiding-bearers,
All hail! But hide not one thing from us. What
Have they determined? The full master-hand
Of the assembled commons, to what deed
Points it?

DANAUS.

Unwaveringly, and in such wise
As made my old heart young—for the free air,
While all freemen made this decision law,
Rustled with multitudes of lifted hands—
The Argives have decreed that we shall hold
This soil with them, immune from all reprisals,
Havoc and harrying of the lustful male;
And of those native here or alien
No man may drive us hence; withal, if force
Be offered, what-so denizen withholds
His aid, shall suffer loss of civil rights
And, furthermore, be banished by the State.
This was the manner of the speech, whereby

The King of the Pelasgians in our cause
Wrought on his auditors: with warning voice
He spake of the hereafter, lest the realm
Feed fat the wrath of Zeus, the Suppliant's God;
We came as fugitives and foreigners,
As citizens we were received; two claims
Conjoinéd in our persons, which, denied,
Would work two-fold contagion, and raise up
Before the city-gates a monster, fed
On sorrow, yet whose craw grief cannot cram.
Then they stayed not to hear the marshal's cry
But on a show of hands would have it so.
It was the voice of the Pelasgians' King
That moved them, suppling the persuasive word,
But Zeus determined what the end should be.

[*He ascends the hill.*

CHORUS.

Oh come! Let us render
  Recompense fair!
A token and tender
  Of thanks, and a prayer
    That good things be showered upon Argos.
Benediction and laud and honour
  In hymns to her praises sung
Shall surely be doubled upon her;
  For dear is an alien tongue
To Zeus who cares for the stranger
  And governs the counsels of Kings;
To an end free from harm and danger
  May he lead our thanksgivings,
    With good gifts shed upon Argos.

In your heavenly habitation,
While I pour my heart's libation
With the wine of prayer o'erflowing,
Hear my voice, ye gods! Hereafter
Never roar of ruddy fire
Strike and slay Pelasgia's city,
Nor the song be heard, where laughter
Is not, nor the dance nor lyre,
Lustful Ares' joyless strain,
Who in fields not of his sowing
Reaps the harvest of the slain.
Forasmuch as they had pity;
For that love their voice inspireth,
Honouring suppliants Zeus befriendeth,
Little flock that sorrow tendeth
And whose portion none desireth.

Neither did they give their voices
For proud men, to do them pleasure;
They have dealt us noble measure
Woman's weaker cause befriending:
For their loftier vision saw
The inexorable Awe,
Angry Zeus, whose wrath requiteth,
Whose sure aim the end achieves;
And with him is no contending.
Where's the dwelling that rejoices
'Neath his heavy visitation—
Like a carrion-bird that lighteth,
Dropping down abomination,
Gorged and bloated, on man's eaves?
Heavily the monster squatteth,

An unlifted, leaden burden.
But these kin have not rejected
Claim of kin: they have respected
Suppliants at Zeus' holy seat.
Therefore they shall have their guerdon,
Altars no pollution spotteth,
To the Gods of Heaven sweet.

Forth, thou bird of plume more fair;
From the mouth's dark covert break,
Emulous and eager prayer;
All prayers else do thou o'ertake.

Never pestilence nor dearth
Empty Argos of her men:
Nor civil tumult stain this earth
With blood of fallen brethren.

Youth be here an unplucked flower;
And Ares, who makes men to mourn,
Though lord of Aphrodite's bower,
That comely blossom leave unshorn.

And, where ancient men convene,
Let there not want within these walls
Bearded benchers of grave mien
Throned in old Cyclopian stalls.

So may wise laws and well-obeyed
Order all things in the land,
Long as reverence is paid
To Zeus, and chiefly Him whose hand

Is over strangers. He alone
  Maintains the right 'gainst wrong and crime,
And confirms to each his own
  By law and precept gray with time.

Everything that fruitful is
  Spring anew from fecund earth,
And may arrowy Artemis
  Bring the struggling babe to birth.

Havoc, come not to rive this land;
Nor bring no arms for Ares' hand,
Who loveth neither dance nor lyre;
Children he hath at his desire
But they are tears: nor the drawn knife
Whet for the dagger-hand of strife
And civil uproar: keep far hence,
Ye croaking flocks of pestilence;
And all young things in this fair ground
Be with thy love, Lycean, crowned.

Zeus make the earth to teem, and bless
With seasonable toll and cess
Of gathered fruit and corn in shocks:
And may the forward-feeding flocks
In her rich pastures multiply:
And all things have prosperity
By the Gods' favour flourishing:
Let minstrels round her altars sing
Sweet lauds; and while the lute leads on
Pure lips send up their orison.

A power obnoxious to no term
Be here: not novel and infirm;
  Soon blown and soon decayed,
  But on old honour stayed;
Prescient in counsel, and withal
Of such foreknowledge liberal;
  Not jealous to exclude
  The sovran multitude,
But rather guide them. And abroad
Let them be slow to draw the sword,
  Much readier to maintain
  By processes humane
Their legal right, than prompt to act:
If bounden, faithful to their pact,
  Their arbiter the Court,
  And war their last resort.
Let them keep fasts and festivals,
Bring wreaths of bay and slaughter bulls,
  As did their sires of old,
  To the Lord Gods who hold
Their land. For reverence and awe
From son to sire is the third law
  Justice hath writ for men
  With monumental pen.

DANAUS.

Dear children, I commend these temperate prayers.
Tremble not if I break to you bad news.
From this our sanctuary and my watch-tower
I see the ship. No: I am not mistaken
All too discernible is the sail—so bent—
The awnings—and the prow with painted eyes

That look before on the untravelled road—
And the quick sense, too quick for those she loves not,
To hearken to the guiding of the helm.
The men on board, their black limbs clothed in white,
Are plain to see. And now the other craft,
Store-ships and all, are in full view. The admiral
Is shortening sail, and, all oars out, rows hard
Under the lee of the land. This must be faced
With a fixed constancy: let not dismay
Divert your thoughts from these still watchful Gods.
I will return anon when I have gotten
Defence and counsel. Like enough a herald—
Or delegates that mean to force you hence—
Graspers at harsh reprisals—nay, but that
Can never be and ye've no cause to fear it.
Nevertheless, if human aid be slow,
Remember, here ye have a present help.
Be of good cheer then; where is he who scorns
The Gods and shall not in Time's great assize
Upon the day appointed, answer it?

[*He descends from the hill*

CHORUS.

Father, I am afraid: the ships have come
So quickly, with scant interval between.
I am possessed with dread,
Doubts and fears importune me,
Lest that my flight far-sped
No way should fortune me.

Oh, when the goal is won,
The struggle nought availeth me;
Father, I am fordone;
For fear my strength faileth me.

DANAUS.

Child, pluck up courage. The recorded vote
Of Argos is a sovran people's voice:
Certain I am that they will fight for thee.

CHORUS.

Ægyptus' sons are wild, abandoned men;
Their lust of battle hard to be appeased:
And if I say so thy heart knows 'tis true.

They have gotten them stalwart ships,
The stout oak braces:
They have gotten them shining ships
With cruel steely faces.

They set a course o'er unknown waves;
They struck an unseen quarry:
And multitudes of tawny slaves
Summoned to their foray.

DANAUS.

Ay, but they'll meet their match; a multitude
Whose arms by oft exposure to the blaze
Of burning noon are firm as marble filed.

CHORUS.

I pray you, leave me not alone, my father.
Left to herself a woman is but nought:
She hath no stomach for brave deeds of war.

But they are men in mind and heart deranged;
Possessed, yea, mad with godless lust and pride:
The human soul in them so much estranged
From holy thoughts, mercy and truth and awe,
They reck them less than crows, with beak and claw,
That rob the altars of things sanctified.

DANAUS.

My children, this shall nothing profit them:
That which provokes in you resentful thoughts
Shall work the wrath of the immortal Gods.

CHORUS.

Father, they fear no tridents: neither can
Arrow or thunderbolt restrain their hands.

They are too much swollen with their own conceit
For awe to sway them; and in violent pride
Have run too far to stay their reckless feet
For aught that preacheth from these holy bounds:
But like a pack of disobedient hounds
They would not hear, though all the Gods should chide.

DANAUS.

Ay, but three dogs are not a match for one
Gray wolf: nor can the byblus-fruit compare
With wheaten corn.

CHORUS.

They are as savage beasts,
All fury and all lust and all uncleanness;
We must defend ourselves against their attack
As quickly as we may.

DANAUS.

Nay, there is time:
Fleets neither set sail nor are brought to anchor
All in a moment: nor, when anchors hold,
Are they who shepherd ships so quick to moor
And trust their safety to a cable's stretch.
And least of all when they have come to a land
That hath no haven, and night draweth on.

For when the sun departeth, night breeds care
For a good seaman; troops cannot be landed
With safety till a ship be snugly berthed.
Then with a quiet mind be vigilant
And ever mindful of the Gods, that so
Ye make their succour certain. For the state,
They shall not need to chide your messenger
Because he's old. For with the spirit of youth
Here in my heart it needs must prompt my tongue.
[*Exit.*

CHORUS.

Ho! Land of hills—
Protectress, held in awe
Of old—now by new bonds of treaty-law
Knit to our hearts—what ills
Must we yet suffer at the hands of men?
Where shall we find a refuge, holy one?
In all this Apian earth is there no glen,
No haunt of darkness hollowed from the sun,
Where we may hide?
I would I were black smoke; a vapour dun
Drawn upwards to the clouds of Zeus' bright day.
Or might I vanish quite away,
Soaring where none should see me; none
Follow: lost in the wide
Of heaven, like dust that needs no wing
To waft it in aerial vanishing.
No refuge left:
No shelter from the slow
Insistent on-fall of unshunnable woe.
As waters in a cleft

My heart's blood eddies turbulent and black.
And this last touch of bitterest irony
Things in themselves untoward do not lack,
That all my father's lookings forth to sea
My feet enmesh;
'Tis I for fear have well nigh ceased to be.
I would about my neck a noose were bound;
I would that there the fated shaft were found
Winged with the wished-for liberty;
Ere flesh from amorous flesh
Recoiling feel the touch abhorred,
I would that I were dead and Hades had for lord.

Oh for a throne in stainless air
Where the moist and dripping cloud
Touches and is turned to snow.
Oh for a smooth and slippery rock
Where the wild goat fears to climb
And no intruding son of Time
Points a finger. Lone and bare
And wrapped in contemplation proud
It o'erhangs the gulf below;
There lean vultures flap and flock;
And, as if indeed it were
A living spirit, its blind wall
Shall bear record of my fall
Headlong—all my sorrows ending
And heartless love which is heart's rending.

Then, I grudge not dogs their prey;
Then, this body of mine shall feast
Birds that haunt the valley grounds.
There's no anguish in such wounds:

They can never bleed afresh.
Dying is to be released
From all ills our living flesh
Would with wailing wish away.
Come with swift forestalling stride,
Death, ere darker deed be done
In the chamber of the bride.
For of all the paths that run
O'er the broad earth 'neath the sun
That which leads to the unwinding
Of my sorrow is past finding.

Cry to Heaven; prayer's full oblation
Moves the Gods and sets me free.
Father, from thy habitation
Watch the battle soon to be.

Turn away from guilt the splendour
Of those eyes whose light is law;
Strong, be thou the weak's defender,
Zeus, who hold'st the world in awe.

For the male hath sought and found me.
Fleeing, whither shall I fly?
Egypt's sons will soon have bound me
Wildered with their battle-cry.

Thine the mighty beam suspended;
All things tremble in thy scale.
What can be begun or ended
Without thee for bliss or bale?

Oh me! I am undone!
What evil errand bringeth thee ashore,
Pirate? A rescue! Ho!

This is the entering in of woe,
But more will follow—more!
To our divine protectors run!
Pelasgus—Lord
Wring their hard hearts with pangs they cannot bear!

[*The* CHORUS *ascend the hill. Enter an* EGYPTIAN HERALD *with* SAILORS.

HERALD.

Aboard! Aboard!
Get to the dhow as fast as feet can carry ye!
Else, I'll pluck out your hair,
Drive ye before me with the slaver's goad,
Hack heads off till blood spouts like rain.
Back to the ship again,
And may the red plague harry ye!

CHORUS.

I would that somewhere on the weltering road
Of multitudinous ocean ye had sunk,
That of its bitter waters ye had drunk
Enough to drown your bark and quench your pride.
Then were we happy sitting side by side,
Even as now we were,
Free from trouble, free from care,
Hid in this leafy bower.
Once and for all hear my commands; lay by
Violence and wrong and mad impiety.
Hence from this holy spot,
And anger not
The Argive power.
Ah, may I never see again the flood

That fatteneth the flesh of Egypt's kine,
And breeds a procreant humour in man's blood
Even as sap clothes the bare bough with green.
Argive I am of long descended line,
Queen, and the daughter of a Queen.

HERALD.

Rant—rail your fill,
But whether ye will not or ye will
Ye must aboard!

CHORUS.

Alack! Why tarry they?
Make speed, or we are lost!

HERALD.

If ye delay,
From where ye sit I'll drag ye with these hands.

CHORUS.

O'er ocean-lawns sheeted with salt sea-spume
May ye be dragged and driven to and fro,
With helpless tossings of those cruel hands,
Where from the Syrian coast the wild winds blow
With wailing heard along the mounded sands
Beneath Sarpedon's tomb.

HERALD.

Shriek, wail and howl and call upon the Gods.
'Tis not so light a thing to overleap.
A ship of Egypt. Wherefore tune thy voice
To sadder music, a more bitter curse.

CHORUS.

The dark wave whelm thee rounding ness on ness
Where Cyprus' forests clothe her capes of wrath,
And Nile, that mighty Nile which sent thee forth,
Strike out thy name—one insolent the less.

HERALD.

Aboard! Aboard! The ship has put about
Ready to go to sea. Get thee aboard,
Or I will lug thee by the forelock.

[*He rushes at the* DANAIDES, *followed by his men.*

CHORUS.

Father, a thing in human shape and yet
A lurker in the net
That Evil spins for mortal woe,
Like an industrious spider to and fro
Weaves link by link and thread by thread
Its latticed snare.
Earth, Mother Earth, the spectre dread,
The black nightmare
Drive far away,
O Mother Earth! O Father Zeus, I pray!

HERALD.

I am not fearful of your Argive Gods:
They suckled not my youth nor fed my age.

CHORUS.

What shall I call thee? A two-footed snake,
A viper creeping from the brake
With venomed fang to bruise
My heel. O Mother Earth,
Drive hence the beast of monstrous birth!
Hear, Mother Earth! Hearken, O Father Zeus!

HERALD.

Get thee aboard and with a better grace;
Else shall thy gauzes, muslins and thy veils
Cry out for ruth and rending reck them not.

CHORUS.

They overpower me! Chiefs, lords, princes, save!

HERALD.

Anon, anon! Courage! Thou soon shalt have
Princes enow: Ægyptus' fifty sons!
Be of good cheer; thou shalt not lack for lords!

CHORUS.

Lost, lost—O King—O sacrilegious slave!

HERALD.

I have thee now; heave her aboard by the hair:
She's a slack one and slow of hearing.

[*Enter* KING *with armed* ATTENDANTS.

KING.

Hold!
Ruffian, what's this? How darest thou insult
Pelasgian soil, ay, and Pelasgia's sons?
Or dost thou think thou'rt come to a land where none
But women dwell? Barbarian to Greek
Is used to be more humble. Thou wilt find
That thy wild shooting misses the just scope
And aim of action, reckoning up thy wrong.

HERALD.

I take thee at thy word and ask thee, where
I reach beyond what law and justice warrant?

KING.

First thou'rt an alien; yet most ignorant
Of what becomes thee in that quality.

HERALD.

Who? I? I found what had been lost: no more.

KING.

Have not you aliens your officers?
And which of these didst thou bespeak?

HERALD.

Hermes,

The Lord of trover.

KING.

O! are Gods thy patrons,
And dost thou serve them with dishonour?

HERALD.

I

Pay worship to the Gods of mighty Nile.

KING.

And ours are nought, if I hear thee aright.

HERALD.

Look you, these women are mine and in my power:
Let me see him who dares to take them from me.

KING.

Lay hands upon them at thy peril.

HERALD.

This

To a stranger! 'Tis not hospitable.

KING.

Tush!

I waste no courtesy on aliens
Who violate the sanctuary of the Gods.

HERALD.

Ægyptus' sons shall hear of this.

KING.

I care not.

HERALD.

Good: but that I may make a clear report—
As heralds should—what shall I say? By whom
Am I dismissed, sent empty-handed back,
These women—cousins, close in blood withal—
Taken from me? Not that weight of evidence
Will here determine in what sense the doom
That Ares must pronounce shall be decreed,
Nor are the damages assessed in coin
And there an end. No: long ere that can be
Many a tall fellow first must bite the dust
And lives be gasped away with writhing of limbs.

KING.

Why should I tell thee who I am? In time
Thou'lt learn my name; thou and thy fellows too.
As for these women, went they willingly,
Were they content, thou might'st lead them away,
Could'st thou show cause that piety allows.
But now the sovran people of this realm
Have with one voice established their decree
Never to yield their virtue up to force.

And through and through that act the nail is driven
So that it standeth fast. Thou hast my answer;
Not writ in folded tablets, nor yet sealed
In any secret scroll: but overt, the plain speech
Of an unfettered tongue. Now—quit my sight.

HERALD.

May victory and power that victory gives
Be with the men.

KING.

Oh, ye will find men here,
Trust me, no bousers of thin barley-brew.

[*Exit* HERALD *and his followers.*

And now with your handmaidens all of you
Walk boldly to the city. 'Tis well fenced
And locked with deep device of wards and towers.
Many fair dwellings are maintained there
At the public charge. With no illiberal hand
Myself am lodged. Here ye may share a house
With others, or, if it likes ye, live alone.
The best is at your service: take your choice
And let it be the fairest ye can find:
'Twill cost ye nothing. Look upon myself
And the whole body of the citizens,
Whose mandate this effects, as your protectors.
More powerful patrons ye've no need to ask.

CHORUS.

Sire, may your great courtesy
Plenteously rewarded be.

Please you now to send to us
Our brave father, Danaus;
His wise forethought points our way;
Where he counsels we obey.
He will choose us our abode
In some kindly neighbourhood.
For so it is, strange speech, strange ways
Are a mark for men's dispraise.
Happier be our lot: may we
Dwell with honour in your land
Free from hatred, censure-free.

Exit KING.

Captives of the bow and spear,
Yet not uncherished, not less dear,
Each in order take your stand
By your mistresses, for you
Are our maiden retinue
That Danaus in his day of power
Gave us for a queenly dower.

[*Enter* DANAUS *with armed guard.*]

DANAUS.

Children, unto the Argives offer prayers,
Blood-offerings and libations, as to Gods
Olympian! for our saviours they are
Past question. When I told their magistrates
How ye were used, their friendly hearts received
My tidings in such wise as to our kin
Shall prove a draught of bitter wine. Myself
This body-guard of spearmen they assigned,
Both that I might be honourably attended,

And lest by sudden sword-stroke I should fall
Ere they could rescue me, unto their land
A burden and a curse for ever. Wherefore
Let gratitude to them hold in your hearts
The highest place and set your course. Moreover
To much already graven there add this
Paternal precept. Time assays the worth
Of things unknown; and every tongue is busy
With a new-comer's reputation, not
Oftenest for good: a word and 'tis bespattered.
Shame me not in your youth when all men's eyes
Will look your way. 'Tis difficult to guard
The tender fruit. It is desired of men
With patient watchings—for desire is human—
Of feathered fowls and beasts that walk the earth.
So with the body: when 'tis melting ripe,
Trust Cypris but the world will hear of it
If once she find the orchard-gate unlatched.
Then at the loveliness of virgin bloom
An arrow winged with dangerous charm is shot
From every roving eye, vanquished at sight
By irresistible desire. Let not
Our wills succumb to that the which to escape
We bore much toil, ploughed many perilous seas
On shipboard: neither let us work ourselves
Shame and confusion, to mine enemies
Triumph and very bliss. A double choice
Is ours. Pelasgus and the State at large
Each offer us a home; and both are free.
You see Fate throws us sixes. It remains
That ye your father's precepts strictly keep,
Counting your virtue dearer than your lives.

CHORUS.

In all things else may the Olympian Gods
Prosper us. For my youth fear not, my father,
In this ripe season of my beauty. If
The Gods have not appointed some new thing
I mean to walk where heretofore I trod.

Set forward to the city then
And to her Gods give thanks,
Lords of their bliss within her walls
Or dwellers by the banks

Of Erasinus old. And you,
Dear maids, our music sweet
Accompany with clapping hands
And dance of rhythmic feet .

Our song is of Pelasgia's town,
And we will hymn no more
The fullness of the fluctuant Nile,
But placid streams that pour

Deep draughts for thirsty lips, and cheer
The land with childish mirth,
Turning stiff tracts of stubborn ground
To soft and fertile earth.

Chaste Artemis, watch over us,
And love come in tender guise,
Not forced by Cytherea's might;
We wish our foes that prize.

SEMI-CHORUS.

But we forget not Cypris. Let none deem
Our harmless song is meant in her dispraise.
For she with Hera sways
The heart of Zeus, and he is Lord Supreme.
The subtle Goddess hath her rites;—with young
Desire playing at his mother's side;
Nor less Persuasion to whose charming tongue
No boon that heart can give or worth approves
May be denied.
Yea, music hath her share
In Aphrodite's Empire fair,
Music with all the train of whispering Loves.

SEMI-CHORUS.

All is fulfilled as Destiny decrees,
And Zeus is great: it is not given to men
To thwart his purposes
Or reach beyond the bounds that he hath set.
Pray rather, then,
That once the rite be said,
This marriage that we so much dread
May bring more bliss than ever wife knew yet.

SEMI-CHORUS.

May the great Zeus grant that I ne'er
Wed with a son of King Ægyptus.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Yea,
That boon were best of all; and yet thy prayer
Would move a will that none can sway.

SEMI-CHORUS.

And thou can'st not discern futurity.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Can I behold the mind of Zeus? Can I
Look into that unfathomable deep?
Due measure when thou prayest thou should'st keep.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Where lies the mark that may not be o'ertrod?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Search not too far the purposes of God.

CHORUS.

Zeus is King: may he decree
I be bounden to no lord
Loathed for lust and cruelty.
Mighty and most gentle, he
With remedial touch restored
Io in her misery
To calm of mind from sorrow free.

And may he this woman's war
Crown with victory. Life and Fate
Demand that we exact no more
Than that good preponderate.
It contents me then, whate'er
The judgment which the Gods approve
If there be embodied there
Justice which my prayers could move.

[*Exeunt.*

THE PERSIANS

SCENE: *An open place before the Tomb of* DARIUS.

CHORUS.

We are the faithful ministers
  Of Persia's absent sons,
That marched away to Hellas;
  Their golden mansions,
Rich with all wealth and splendour,
  Are in our trust and care,
For the great king, King Xerxes,
  Darius' son and heir,
Chose us as wise men well in years
  The realm for him to hold;
But for his homeward progress
  His host a-gleam with gold,
The boding heart is harried
  With auguries of ill:
Asia is stripped of manhood;
  A young king hath his will:
But to this metropolitan
  Proud siege of Persia's kings
No runner comes, no rider
  Good news or bad news brings.
To Susa and Ecbatana
  They bade a long farewell;

They saw behind them sink from sight
  Old Kissia's citadel;
And some rode out on horseback,
  And some in long ships sailed;
Stout plodders closing up their ranks
  The footmen strode all-mailed.
Amistres hasteth with them,
  And great Artaphrenes,
Astaspes, Megabates,
  Lords of rich satrapies,
Kings on whose throne a greater
  Its majesty uprears,
Marshals of an uncounted host,
  Bowmen and cavaliers,
They sweep forever onward;
  Their daunting looks dismay,
And jubilant are their high hearts
  For joy of coming fray.
Lord of the bow, Imaeus,
  Sosthenes, charioteer,
Artembares, the rider bold
  Whom charging squadrons cheer,
Masistres and Pharandaces;
  With many a doughty fere
Whom Nile, great nourisher of men,
  Sent forth; Pegastogon,
Egyptian born; Susiskanes,
  And Artames, whose wone
Is sacred Memphis;—there he rules;
  And Ariomardus, lord
Or Thebes, that ancient child of Time;
  Marsh-folk to pull aboard

The galleys,—fearsome combatants
Past count; and in their train
The langour-loving Lydians,
Lords of the Asian main.
Two royal men command them,
Arcteus of fair renown,
And the great lord Metrogathes;
And their all-golden town,
Sardis, hath sent forth men that ride
On cars of aspect dread,
With double yoke of horses,
And triple harnesséd:
And Tharubis and Mardon,
Of Tmolus' holy hill
Near neighbours both, have ta'en an oath,
(The which may heaven fulfil,)
To cast the yoke on Hellas
That holdeth freedom dear;
They are the stuff of iron tough,
Hard anvils to the spear.
Then come the Mysian slingers;
And golden Babylon
Hath sent a mingled, motley host,
Endlessly winding on;
And some are sailors of the fleet,
And others draw the bow;
All Asia pours her falchion-men;
The great king bids them go.
Ay, they are gone! The bloom, the rose,
The pride of Persian earth:
And with a mighty longing
The land that gave them birth,

Asia, their nursing mother, mourns;
And day succeeds to day,
And wives and little ones lose heart,
Sighing the time away.

I grant you that our royal host,
The walléd city's scourge,
Hath long since reached the neighbour coast
That frowns across the surge;
Hath roped with mooréd rafts the strait,
Their path the heaving deck,
At Athamantid Helle's Gate
Upon the sea's proud neck
Bolting a yoke from strand to strand:
And Asia's hordes, I grant,
Outnumber the uncounted sand:
Our king is valiant:
He shepherdeth a mighty flock,
God's benison therewith,
Till iron arms all Hellas lock,
Port, isle and pass and frith.
And at his word leap captains bold
Ready to do or die,
Being himself of the race of gold,
Equal with God most high.
The dragon-light of his black eyes
Darts awe, as to express
The lord of mighty argosies
And minions numberless.
So, seated in his Syrian car,
He leads 'gainst spear and pike
His sagittaries: death from far
Their wounding arrows strike.

Meseemeth none of mortal birth
That tide of men dare brave,
A sea that delugeth the earth,
A vast resistless wave.
No! Persia's matchless millions
No human power can quell,
Such native valour arms her sons,
Such might incomparable!
For Fate from immemorial age
Chose out her sons for power:
Bade them victorious war to wage
And breach the bastioned tower:
In chivalry to take delight
Where clashing squadrons close:
Kingdoms and polities the might
Of their strong arm o'erthrows.
They gaze on ocean lawns that leap
With bickering billows gray
Swept by fierce winds; their myriads sweep
Ocean's immense highway,
Where, leashed with cables fibre-fine,
Their buoyant galleys bridge
The rough waves of the sundering brine
From ridge to crested ridge.
And yet what man, of woman born,
Outwits the guile of God?
The pit He digs what foot may scorn,
Though with all lightness shod?
For ruin first with laughing face
Lures man into the net,
Whence never wight of mortal race
Leapt free and scatheless yet.

These are the thoughts that fret and fray
The sable garment of my soul.
Shall Persia's host sing, *Wellaway,*
With universal shout of dole:
Shall Susa hear, of manhood shorn?
Shall this imperial city mourn?

Yea, and shall Kissia's castle-keep
With answering note of grief reply?
Shall huddled women wail and weep
Bearing the burthen to that cry,
While torn in rents their raiment falls
And tattered hang their costly shawls?

Not one is left: all they that drive
Or ride proud steeds, all footmen stout,
Like swarming bees that quit the hive,
With him that leads the dance, went out;
Shackling two shores across the sea
They thrust a floating promontory.

But beds are wet with many a tear
Where late the longed-for love lay warm;
New luxury of grief is dear
To our fair Persians: some mailed form
She kissed 'Goodbye,' her love, her own,
Each misses, left in wedlock lone.

Men of Persia, here in council, seated round this ancient roof,
Sounding deep, for sore the need is, let us put it to the proof,
How it fareth with King Xerxes, great Darius' golden heir,

Lord of lieges, mighty dynast, who made Persia rich and fair;
Whether conquest wingeth onward with the drawing of the bow
Or the ashen-hafted spear-head crowns with victory the foe.
But, behold, a light that shineth with august and godlike rays,
Royal Mother of King Xerxes, regnant Queen of my young days;—
Rapidly her chariot rolleth; in the dust I lay me prone;
Homage, love and loyal duty proffer we in unison.

[*Enter the* QUEEN.]

Queen-Dowager of Persian dames deep-veiled,
Mother of Xerxes and Darius' wife,
Spouse of a god, and not less justly hailed
As to one godlike authoress of life,—
Unless the power that prospered us of yore
Now with our armies goeth out no more!

QUEEN.

Therefore am I come forth into the day
From golden courts and that one chamber fair
Where in my arms the great Darius lay.
My heart too feels the canker-fret of care;
Good friends, I have a story for your ears
That wakes within a train of haunting fears.

What if great wealth should scatter in his stride
The prosperous glory that Darius reared,
God being with him? Doubts new-felt divide
My mind. Possessions must not be revered

Save as men use them; yet they that have none
How poor! To them what lustre hath the sun?

For in themselves great riches are not wrong:
That's not my fear: but when the master's eye
Through absence fails, the thought in me is strong,
A house is blind except its lord be by.
Herein, grave sirs, interpret and advise;
In your sage counsel all my wisdom lies.

CHORUS.

Be sure of this, Queen of this land of ours,
There never was nor ever can be need
To ask us twice for help by word or deed,
So far as ripe experience empowers
Leal hearts to proffer guidance: in our breast
There is no thought save how to serve thee best.

QUEEN.

I am much conversant with dreams at night
Since with his army my dear son is gone
To ravage and lay waste Ionia,
But nothing yet so startlingly distinct
As yesternight, as you shall forthwith hear.
For there appeared to me in bright apparel
Two women; one with Persian robes adorned,
The other in the Dorian garb; and each
Taller in stature than are women now,
Faultlessly fair, both sisters of one house.
The first in Hellas dwelt, by sortilege
Assigned; the other lived in Barbary.

And so it was, that in my dream methought
There was some kind of quarrel 'twixt the twain,
Which, when my dear son was apprised of it,
He would compose and make them live as friends.
And so he harnessed them to a chariot
Lashing their necks to the yoke. And the tall form
Clad in our raiment answered to the rein;
But the other struggled; tore the tackle up
And without bit or bridle breaking loose
Snapped the strong yoke asunder. My son fell;
And suddenly his father stood beside him,
Even Darius, sorry for his fall.
This is the vision I beheld last night.
But when I rose and in fair-flowing stream
Had washed my hands, so cleansed for sacrifice
I stood before an altar, purposing
To make my offering of the elements
To the Divine Forfenders, whose indeed
The office is. And, lo, an eagle fled
To Phoebus' burning brazier! Good my friends,
When I saw that I was struck dumb with fear.
And presently a falcon flew at him,
Beat him about the body with its wings,
And with its claws his proud crest-feathers plucked.
And strange—and passing strange—the eagle quailed
Nor dared at all retaliate. What I saw
Filled me with dread and will affright your ears.
Well do ye know that if our son succeed
He will become the wonder of the world;
And even if he fail, there is no law
Can call him to account; but unimpaired,
Life granted him, his throne is o'er this land.

CHORUS.

Mother, we would not by aught we might say
Alarm unduly or raise hopes too high.
Better approach the gods, better go pray,
If shapes of ugly seeming haunt thine eye.
Beseech them to deliver thee from ill,
And for thyself, thy children and the State
And all thou lovest good things to fulfil.
This done, with drink-offerings propitiate
Earth and the dead; and then entreat thy spouse,
Darius, whom thou say'st that yesternight
Thou did'st behold, for thee and for thy house
Up from the underworld into the light
To send good luck, and adverse things blindfold
Muffle in nether darkness. Not untaught
By my prophetic soul have I made bold
To speak, convinced so best may good be sought.

QUEEN.

Well, come what may, my dream hath found in thee
A first expounder loyal to our son
And all our house. May fair as fair can be
Befall. I'll get me home. All shall be done
In honour of the gods and the dear dead
That dwell beneath the earth, as thou hast said.
But, good my friends, tell me where Athens lies?

CHORUS.

Far, far away, westwards—beyond these skies,—
Where kingly Helios pales his golden fires.

QUEEN.

Is that the land that our dear son desires,
Gone on so long a chase, to make his prey?

CHORUS.

Assuredly: if Athens own his sway
All Hellas must before his footstool bend.

QUEEN.

Is't a great people? Can this Athens send
'Gainst him a numerous armament?

CHORUS. We Medes

Have cause to know their army by its deeds.

QUEEN.

Are they great archers then?

CHORUS.

Princess, not so:
'Tis not the arrow's point, the sinewy bow,
That makes them to be feared: stand they or charge
They are close fighters with the spear and targe.

QUEEN.

What more of mark? Have they much wealth laid by?

CHORUS.

A vein of silver is their treasury.

QUEEN.

Who is the ruler of this people? Who
Lord of their levies and their revenue?

CHORUS.

Subject they are not unto any man:
They say 'slave' sorts not with 'Athenian.'

QUEEN.

Have they no master? The less likely they
To stand their ground against invaders.

CHORUS. Nay,
Darius' armament this kingless folk
For all its splendour and its numbers broke
And utterly destroyed.

QUEEN.
There's matter here
For anxious questionings, not without fear,
For all whose sons went up 'gainst Athens.

CHORUS. Thou,
O Queen, if that I err not, shalt even now
Hear the authentic story. Here is a man
Able to tell us how the Persians ran
In this momentous race; and, whether good
Or ill his tidings, he brings certitude.
Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.
Ye habitations of broad Asia,
And thou, O land of Persia, receipt
Of affluent wealth, how much and how great glory
Hath perished at a blow! Of Persian men
The flower is fall'n and vaded! Woe is me!
Ill is it to be the bearer of bad tidings,
And yet, for hard necessity constrains,
I am to cloak up nothing, Persians—tell
The woeful tale to the end! All's lost; the power
Of Barbary is utterly destroyed.

CHORUS.
O unimagined ruin, dark and drear
And fathomlessly deep!

Weep, men of Persia, while ye hear
And harken while ye weep!

MESSENGER.

Yea, we have fought it to a finish—I
Thought not to see the day of my return.

CHORUS.

O life! too tedious pilgrimage
To the last span outdrawn!
On fading eyes waxed dim with weary age
Was this dark day to dawn?

MESSENGER.

Persians, the story that I have to tell
Is not a thing caught up from others' lips;
All ills prepared for our discomfiture
Myself was witness of; yea, had my share.

CHORUS.

Vain, vain the arrow-blast,
The tumult of loud war!
Vain all the missiles Asia idly cast
On Hellas' fatal shore!

MESSENGER.

The bodies of men miserably slain
Lie heaped upon the shore of Salamis
And glut full many a creek and cove thereby.

CHORUS.

The bodies of the men that died
The breakers buffet, the billows beat!
Tinct with the azure of the sea-salt tide,
Rolled with the wreckage of a shattered fleet!

MESSENGER.

There was no help in arrow or in bow!
Our whole fleet foundered when their warships rammed.

CHORUS.

Howl! Cry aloud! Call down upon the foe
Ages of anguish and inexorable woe!
All evil that their hearts devised they wrought!
Mourn for the mighty host that they have brought to nought!

MESSENGER.

O Salamis! thou execrable name!
Athens! My spirit mourns remembering thee!

CHORUS.

Athens! for ever hateful to thy foes!
Written in memory's book for thee the record glows,
The long, long roll, past count, of them that mourn
In every Persian home husbandless and forlorn!

QUEEN.

I have kept silence long; calamity
Hath struck me dumb: for this surpassing grief
May not be told and stops the mouth of question.
But men must bear the troubles Heaven sends.
Compose thyself then; and this dire disaster,
Much as thou mournest it, fully unfold.
Who hath not fallen? And whom must we lament
Among the leaders of the people? Who
Of titled and of sceptred rank hath left
A gap among our noblest by his death?

MESSENGER.

Xerxes himself is among the living; he
Beholds the light of day.

QUEEN.

A light indeed
To me and all my house! A glad day-break
After black mirk of night.

MESSENGER.

But Artembares
Chief of ten thousand horse, is brayed and beat
All up and down the sharp Silenian shore.
And Dadakas, the Chiliarch, struck by a spear
Dropped like an airy diver in the sea.
And Tenagon, most noble Tenagon,
True Bactrian to the core, is a wanderer now
Round Ajax' wave-washed, ocean-echoing isle.
Lilaeus, Arsames and Argétes
Fell fighting, and are ground against the rocks
That gird the steep holm where the ring-doves breed:
And Arcteus, neighbour once of inland streams,
Founts of Egyptian Nilus, and Adeues,
Yea, and Pharnuchus, weighted with the load
Of ponderous armour—three from out one ship—
Plunged overboard. The Chrysian Matallus,
Lord of ten thousand fighting men, went down.
And he who marshalled thirty thousand horse,
All black, his dark, flame-coloured, bushy beard
Dyed gules in his own gore. The Arabian
Magus, and Artames the Bactrian,
Far from the rough, stern land he chose for home,
Perished in those disastrous seas. There sank
Amistris; and Amphistreus cast away
His spear. And Ariomardus, good as brave,
To the great grief of Sardis met his death.

And Seisames the Mysian is slain:
And Tharubis, of five times fifty ships
Grand Admiral—he was Lernæan-born
And beautiful withal—is lost. Alack!
He gave his life in an unlucky cause.
The bravest of the brave, Syennesis,
Generalissimo of the Cilicians,
A man whose splendid valour cost more blood
To the enemy than any single foe,
Died gloriously. Thus much have I told
Touching the captains of the host. And now
Some few disasters, where they came in crowds,
I will relate.

QUEEN.

This is the very crown
And summit of all sorrow. For proud Persia
Direst humiliation: shriek on shriek
Shall follow on thy news. But retrace thy steps;
Tell me how many sail the Hellenes had
That they dared close upon the Persian power
And ram us ship for ship.

MESSENGER.

Ah, had it lain
With numbers to decide, be well assured
Victory had crowned the fleet of Barbary!
The whole Hellenic navy was no more
Than ten divisions of thirty sail apiece,
And but a tithe of them in the fighting-line!
Xerxes, it is a point within my knowledge,
Went into action with a thousand sail:
Two hundred ships and seven of high speed

Is the reputed reckoning. Accuse us not
That in this fight we failed to play the man:
A God it was who broke our power, weighed down
The judgment scale with no impartial hand.
There are divinities that keep the realm
Of divine Pallas safe.

QUEEN.

Is Athens safe?
Is not the city sacked?

MESSENGER.

Ay, but her men!
They live, and therefore her defence is sure.

QUEEN.

Tell me how first the fleets encountered; who
Began the attack, the Hellenes or my son
Exulting in the number of his ships?

MESSENGER.

Princess, the first beginner of all the woes
That afterwards ensued, though whence he came
None knoweth, was some genius of wrath,
Some wicked spirit such as lures men on
To their destruction. There came a man,
A Hellene, from the Athenian host, and he
On this wise spake unto Xerxes, thy son—
'If there shall come a dusk and darksome night
The Hellenes will not tarry; leaping down
Upon their rowers' benches they will pull
For safety, hither, thither scattering
In secret flight.' And when thy son heard that
He instantly—perceiving not the guile
Of the Hellene nor the spite of jealous Gods,—

Made known to all the captains of his ships
That when the burning sun should cease to beam
Across the world, and glimmering twilight took
The court and curtilage of serene air,
The main armada must disperse and form
Three squadrons line abreast, blocking the exits
And narrow channels where the salt waves churn:
The residue to compass Ajax' Isle.
Then, if the Hellenes turned to flee from doom
By privily withdrawing in the dark,
Not one could get away, but their whole fleet
Must fall into our hands. So spake the king
In sanguine mood, with not the least surmise
Of the divine purpose, presently fulfilled.
And not at all in any disarray
But with a disciplined obedience,
They made their dinner ready, every seaman
Lashing his oar-shank to the well-turned thole;
And when the sun waxed dim and night came on,
Each master oarsman went aboard his ship
And every captain of the fighting crews,
And down the long lines of those ships of war
Squadron to squadron spake right cheerily,
Hailing each other; not a ship of them
Lost her allotted station; and all night
The captains kept them cruising to and fro.
And night passed, and the Hellenic armament
Made no attempt to steal away unseen.
But when with her white horses day shone fair
And overspread the broad and ample earth,
There rose and rang from the Hellenic host
A roar of voices musical with psalms,

And loudly from the island precipices
Echo gave back an answering cheer. Thereat
Seeing their judgment grievously at fault,
Fear fell on the barbarians. Not for flight
Did the Hellenes then chant that inspiring hymn,
But resolutely going into battle,
Whereto the trumpet set all hearts on fire.
The word was given, and, instantaneously,
Oars smote the roaring waves in unison
And churned the foam up. Soon their whole fleet appeared;
The port division thrown out like a horn
In precise order; then the main of them
Put out against us. We could plainly hear
The thunder of their shouting as they came.
'Forth, sons of Hellas! free your land, and free
Your children and your wives, the native seats
Of Gods your fathers worshipped and their graves.
This is a bout that hazards all ye have.'
And verily from us in the Persian tongue
There rose an answering roar; the long suspense
Was ended. In an instant, ship smote ship,
With thrust of armoured prow. The first to ram
Was a Greek; that impact carried clean away
A tall Phoenician's poop. Then all came on,
Each steering forthright for a ship of ours.
At first the encountering tide of Persians held;
But caught in the narrows, crowded without sea-room,
None could help other; nay, they fell aboard
Their own ships, crashing in with beak of bronze,
Till all their oars were smashed. But the Hellenes
Rowed round and round, and with sure seamanship

Struck where they chose. Many of ours capsized,
Until the very sea was hid from sight
Choked up with drifting wreckage and drowning men.
The beaches and low rocks were stacked with corpses:
The few barbarian vessels still afloat,
Fouling each other fled in headlong rout.
But they with broken oars and splintered spars
Beat us like tunnies or a draught of fish,
Yea, smote men's backs asunder; and all the while
Shrieking and wailing hushed the ocean surge,
Till night looked down and they were rapt away.
But, truly, if I should discourse the length
Of ten long days I could not sum our woes.
There never yet 'twixt sunrise and sunset
Perished so vast a multitude of men.

QUEEN.

Woe! woe! An ocean of calamity
Hath broke on Persia and all Barbary.

MESSENGER.

But this is not the half. A grief ensued
So heavy, its forerunner kicks the beam.

QUEEN.

Oh, can misfortune come in hatefuller shape?
What spite of malice adverse to our host
Sweeps through some more immeasurable arc
The moving finger that metes out our woes?

MESSENGER.

The prime of Persian manhood, men who had
True greatness in their souls, illustrious born,
And ever among the first in the king's trust,
Died miserably a most inglorious death.

QUEEN.

Good friends, was ever woman so accursed
With evil fortune? Tell me how they died.

MESSENGER.

There is an island opposite the shores
Of Salamis, a little, wretched isle,
With never a safe cove where ships may ride,
But Pan, who loves the choric dance, haunts there,
Footing it lightly on the wave-washed strand.
Thither the king despatched them, with intent
That when the enemy, forced to abandon ship,
Sought safety on that isle, they might with ease
Put all the host of Hellas to the sword,
And rescue their own comrades from the salt
Sea-friths. But he judged ill the event. For when
The Gods the glory of the sea-fight gave
Unto the Hellenes, armed to the teeth they sprang
Ashore and compassed the whole island round,
So that they knew not where to turn. And many
They battered to death with stones: some they shot dead
With arrows: finally, to make an end,
Rushed in and finished off their butcher's work
Hacking their helpless victims limb from limb,
Until not one of them was left alive.
And Xerxes, when he saw that depth beyond
All depths of sorrow, wailed aloud. For he sat
Upon a throne conspicuous to the host,
On a high hill beside the open sea.
There with rent robes and a heart-piercing cry
Straightway he gave the signal to his troops
Drawn up upon the shore and let them go

In wild, disordered flight. This further stroke
Of fortune's malice fell for thee to mourn.

QUEEN.

O wicked spirit! How did'st thou beguile
Our Persians' hearts! How bitter a revenge
Upon illustrious Athens was vouchsafed
To our dear son! Not all that Barbary lost
Beforetime on the field of Marathon
Sufficed! But, thinking to repay in kind
All that we suffered there, he hath drawn on
A deluge of immeasurable woe!
But tell me of the ships that 'scaped destruction,
Where didst thou leave these? Hast sure news of them?

MESSENGER.

The captains of the remnant hoisted sail
And ran before the wind, a rabble rout.
But the remainder of our army perished
In the Boeotian country, some of thirst
For lack of solace of refreshing springs.
We that were left, taking no time to breathe,
Crossed into Phocis and the Locrian land
And the Maliac gulf where the Spercheius flows
Watering a broad plain with his gracious stream.
Achaia and the Thessalian cities then
Opened to us their gates, but we were sore
Straitened for lack of meat. And there the most
Perished of thirst and hunger, for, God wot,
We must contend with both. Anon we came
To the Magnesian country and the coasts
Of Macedonia by the Axian frith
And Bolbe's reedy marshes and the range

Pangaean—country of Edonia.
And on that very night God caused a frost
Out of due season : Strymon's holy stream
Was frozen over. And many, that heretofore
Denied the Gods, thanked heaven upon their knees,
Yea, bowed themselves to earth and sky. And when
They had made an end of calling on the Gods
The host began to cross on the firm ice.
And whoso crossed before the beams of God
Were scattered wide, reached safety. But anon
The round, bright sun with blazing rays of fire
Made right across the stream a waterway,
Thawing the midst thereof with glowing heat.
And then they fell in heaps : he happiest
Who soonest gasped away the breath of life.
All that were left, all that had won to safety,
Crossed Thrace and in the teeth of fearful hardships,
That desperate retreat accomplished, came—
But they were few indeed—to their own home.
Behold these things are merest truth : but much
I leave unsaid ; many and grievous woes
The wrath of God hurled down upon our host.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.

CHORUS.

Spirit whose dispensation is too hard,
Thou hast set a heavy foot upon our necks,
Ground Persia in the dust !

QUEEN.

My heart is sick ;
I mourn a vanished host ! Visions of the night
How plainly ye portended woe ! And you,

How fondly ye interpreted my dream!
Natheless, since here at least your oracle
Fails not, I will go pray, first to the Gods;
Then I will take the sacred elements,—
Offerings to earth, oblations to the dead,—
And come to you again. Things past I know;
But I would fain inquire if what's to come
Promises better fortune. Lend your aid:
With men of trust true counsel take, I charge ye;
And, if our son return in the meantime,
Console him and escort him to our house,
Lest that on woe there follow further woe.

[*Exit* QUEEN.

CHORUS.

O Zeus, thou art king! There is none thee beside!
Thou hast shattered our host and humbled our pride!
Thou hast darkened with grief the light of thy day
O'er Susa and Ecbatana!
They have rent their thin veils, their kerchiefs thread-drawn,
Our delicate mourners; their wimples of lawn
They have drenched with salt tears; the young wife newly-wed
Looks out for her lord, but he comes not; her bed,
Laid soft with fair linen, where love had his bliss,
Standeth vacant; cold sorrow their banqueter is;
But they rise up an-hungered, though they sit long;
And I too o'er the fallen would utter my song.

This earth, this Asia, wide as east from west,
Mourns—empty,—of her manhood dispossessed.
Xerxes the King led forth his war-array!
Xerxes the King hath cast his host away!

Xerxes the King (Oh King unwise!)
Steered in the wake of doom his orient argosies!
How fell it that Darius, lord of the bow,
In Susa long ago,
Fair fortune had? That then
He who ruled Persia won the hearts of men?

The ships, the swarthy ships, with brow of gloom
And wide wings woven on the weary loom,
Landsmen and mariners haled to that far shore!
The ships, the black ships whelmed them evermore!
They struck, they split, they filled,
They sank: and, oh, death's throes Ionian vengeance stilled.
And now by plain and pass, rude, wild and bare,
In the frore Thracian air,
After long wandering,
Scarce 'scaped with life, comes home our lord the King.

But they on that wild water,
Firstlings of death and slaughter,
Roam, where the long waves lash Kychrean sands;
Roam, but no wave shall lift them,
Nor ebb nor flood-tide drift them
To this dear earth beloved above all lands.
Wide as the sky, and deep
As those dark waters sweep,
Wail! let grief gnaw your heart, and wring your hands!

Combed with no tender combing,
Where angry waves break foaming,
Children of Ocean's unpolluted tide
Flesh their dumb mouths, and tear
The dead men once so fair:

Old eyes are wet whose tears Time long since dried;
The sire weeps his lost son,
The home its goodman gone,
And all the woeful tale is bruited far and wide.

They pay no more tribute; they bow them no more!
The word of power is not spoken
By the princes of Persia; their day is o'er,
And the laws of the Medes are broken
Through Asia's myriad-peopled land;
For the staff is snapped in the King's right hand.

And a watch is not set on the free, frank tongue,
Yea, liberty's voice speaks loud;
And the yoke is loosed from the neck that was wrung
And the back to dominion bowed:
For the earth of Ajax isle is red
With the blood of Persia's noble dead!

Enter the QUEEN.

QUEEN.

Good friends, the heart that hath found trouble knows
That when calamity is at the flood
We shake at shadows; but, if once the tide
Flow fair, and fortune send a prospering wind,
We cannot think that it will change. To me
All prayers I offer now are full of dread,
And voices loud, but not with victory,
Sound in mine ears; so fell a stroke of fortune
Dismays my soul. Therefore am I returned,
Not as of late with chariots and with pomp;
I bring libations due from son to sire,
Meet for propitiation; gifts that please

Dead bodies in their graves. Milk, white and pure,
And crystal honey cropped from bee-searched flowers,
And cool cups drawn from virgin founts; and here,
Pressed from wild nature's bosom, is strong wine,
The jocund youngling of an ancient stem;
And I have oil of olive, amber-clear,
Sweet esence of a never-fading tree,
And wreathéd blossoms,—children all of earth
That yieldeth every fruit. Then, dear my friends,
Accompany with song acceptable
These luscious draughts that soothe the silent dead,
And forth from his sepulchral monument
Call up Darius' spirit. The cup earth drinks
I will pour out to the Gods of the underworld.

CHORUS.

Queen of Persia, chief in worth,
'Neath the chambers of the earth,
Send thy rich libations streaming;
We with prayers of holy seeming
Will beseech the dead that there
They may find acceptance fair.
Gods infernal, pure and holy,
Earth and Hermes, melancholy
Lord of death and gloom and night,
Send his soul up to the light.
He will heal,—point undismayed
Where grief's far horizons fade.

Peer of the Gods, whose kingly state
  Is evermore felicity!
Shifting as the shocks of fate
  Sinks and soars our endless cry

Uttered in an ancient tongue:
Hearest thou the shades among?

All ye gods of souls earth-bound,
  Hearken! Earth, break up thy sod!
Grant us sight from thy dark ground
  Of Susa's son and Persia's god!
To such an ample spirit ne'er
Persian earth gave sepulchre.

Dear was the man; dear is his burial-mound!
A power sleeps here, whose influence shall not fade!
Oh, where he sits sole King 'mong Kings discrowned,
Aidoneus, dim Aidoneus, speed Darius' shade!

In wantonness of heart he ne'er made war,
Nor lost a world wasting the lives of men;
They hailed him their God-given counsellor;—
God-given he was, and great was Persia's glory then.

Old majesty! Great Padishah!
  Come forth, and from thy barrow high,
Show the white plume of thy tiar,
  Thy buskin dipped in crocus-dye!
Unclouded spirit, morning-clear—,
King—Sire—Darius! reappear!

Griefs thy glory never knew,
  Lord of our Lord, thy coming stay.
A mist hath fallen of Stygian hue;
  Persia's youth is cast away!
Unclouded spirit, morning-clear,
King—Sire—Darius! reappear!

Thou, whose passing nations wept,
Wherefore hath ambition swept
Worlds that thou didst hold in fee,
Empire, awe and admiralty,
In one headlong ruin borne?
Ships perfidious, ships foresworn,
Crewless, oarless, scallop-scaled,
Ye your pride to Hellas vailed,
Hidden from the sight of suns
That gild her golden galleons!

[*The Ghost of* DARIUS *ascends from his tomb.*

DARIUS.

Trusty and well-beloved! Comrades of mine
When we were young together; now most grave
Signors of Persia, what afflicts the realm?
Earth groans and jars and frets with fevered pulse;
I see my consort standing by my tomb,
And verily I am afraid. Withal,
The cup of kind remembrance, poured in prayer,
I have received. And ye make lamentation
Beside my sepulchre in such shrill key
As calls up spirits: yea, with piteous cries
Summon me from my grave; and wayleave thence
Is hard to come by; for the infernal Gods
Love better to hold fast than to let go.
Nevertheless, with them have I prevailed,
And ye behold me! Haste! my time is short
And I would not offend. What aileth Persia?
What strange, what heavy stroke hath smitten her?

CHORUS.

I dare not meet thy gaze : I fear
To speak what must offend thine ear ;
With veiléd eyes, I bow me prone,
As at the footstool of thy throne !

DARIUS.

Know that by strong persuasion of thy grief
I am ascended from the shades. Be brief ;
Put awe and forms of courtly speech away,
And utter boldly all thou hast to say.

CHORUS.

Thou askest speech of me, and I
Fear to do that courtesy ;
At thy bidding to impart
Tidings which must grieve thy heart.

DARIUS.

Since thine old awe is not to be enforced,
Good Queen, dear partner death alone divorced
From spousal joys, though thee the touch of age
Hath changed to outward view, this grief assuage,
These sobs and tears give o'er : take courage then
To speak but one clear word to me ; for men
Cast in the mould of frail humanity
Are heirs to all its ills : by land and sea
Evils a-many are reserved for man,
If that Time lengthen out his little span.

QUEEN.

O of mankind the happiest by far,
While thou didst yet behold the day's bright star,
How enviable in thy life wast thou !
How like a god thy days were passed And now

I envy thee in death: yea, count it bliss
Not to have lived to search the black abyss,
The bottomless pit of sorrow. Dear my lord,
Darius, to sum all in one brief word;
Persia lies waste—a kingdom desolate!

DARIUS.

Speak'st thou of plague and famine! Or is the state
By rancour of domestic faction rent?

QUEEN.

Nothing of this; her mighty armament
Hath suffered ruin round the Athenian coast.

DARIUS.

Tell me; what son of mine led forth our host?

QUEEN.

Impetuous Xerxes: and to fill his train
Emptied of manhood Asia's vasty plain.

DARIUS.

And on this rash attempt, of folly born,
Went he by land or sea?

QUEEN.

With either horn,
Broadening the thrust of his battle-front, he planned
A double enterprise by sea and land.

DARIUS.

How found he means o'er all the realms that lie
'Twixt us and Persia, plains and mountains high,
To launch on foot an armament so vast?

QUEEN.

A yoke on Helle's stormy frith he cast
And made a causeway through the unruly sea.

DARIUS.

A giant's toil to shut with lock and key
The wrathful Bosphorus!

QUEEN.

The thing was done!
Methinks, an unseen power helped our son.

DARIUS.

A power of might indeed to send him mad!

QUEEN.

Ay, since the achievement evil issue had!

DARIUS.

What fate hath foiled our arms that ye make moan
For fallen men?

QUEEN.

The fleet is overthrown
And in its ruin whelmed the host on shore.

DARIUS.

Then hath my people perished? Hath grim war
Ta'en toll of all?

QUEEN.

Yea, Susa lieth bare,
And mourns her perished youth, her manhood fair.

DARIUS.

Oh, the lost levies! Oh, the bright array
Of proud confederate peoples!

QUEEN.

Bactria
Through all her clans and Egypt's commonalty
For children lost lift up a bitter cry.

DARIUS.

Calamitous adventurer! thine emprise
Hath drained the very sap of thine allies!

QUEEN.

Xerxes, a lonely man, that few attend,
They say ——

DARIUS.

What say they? Draws he to an end
Of his long march? And hath he haply found
Some place of safety?

QUEEN.

Yea, the stormy sound
And the long bridge that spans the sundering sea,
Which when he hailed a happy man was he!

DARIUS.

So, he hath crossed the strait and touched the strand
And journeys delicately through the land
Of Asia—or thou hast heard things false and smooth?

QUEEN.

None challengeth these tidings; they are clear truth
And beyond cavil.

DARIUS.

Ah, with how swift stride
Hath come fulfilment of things prophesied!
How on my son hath Zeus in anger sent
The end foretold, which my fears did prevent!
For long ago I knew the Gods would speed
The final consummation of that rede,

And when man, shod with haste and girt with pride,
Beckons his own doom, God is on his side.
And now, methinks, to all men of good will
The fount lies bare whence flowed this broadening ill;
But the event my son too rashly wrought
In the blind arrogance of childish thought.
He dreamed that he could chain, as men chain slaves,
The holy haste of Hellespontine waves,
God's flowing Bosphorus; another measure
Presumed to teach its billows, at his pleasure
Bound them in linkéd fetters hammered fast,
Yea, made a high way, where his army passed.
A mortal man on all the Gods that be
He ventured war; the lordship of the sea,
Poseidon's realm (he judged so much amiss),
Challenged and thought to quell. And was not this
The very madness of a mind diseased?
Prosperity and power and wealth, which eased
The lives of men, my long reign's rich reward,
Is plunder now for some freebooter's sword!

QUEEN.

All this impetuous Xerxes, over-ruled
By evil men, in their rash counsel schooled,
Learned; for they taught him that thy valour won
Great opulence and wide dominion
For thy succeeding heirs; and 'twas a taunt
Of theirs that he at home was valiant,
But with new wealth no wise increased thy store:
And so detraction oft-repeated bore
Ill fruit: to doom the readiest way he went
And against Hellas launched his armament.

DARIUS.

And in all truth the thing that he hath done
Is great in consequence, in memory
Never to be forgotten: such a fall
From power and glory, such a grievous loss
Ne'er yet made Susa empty, since the day
When first King Zeus assigned her pride of place,
Centreing in one man dominion
Over all Asia rich in fleece and flock,
The staff of Empire steady in his hand.
It was a Mede that mastered first her hosts;
His son completed that which he began,
For wisdom laid her hand upon the helm
And caution tempered daring. Third from him
Reigned Cyrus, blest in all he undertook.
He with all friendly powers established peace
On firm foundations. His arm was stretched
Over the land of Lydia, and he
Made Phrygia vassal; all Ionia
He drave before him with the reins of power;
Neither provoked he God to jealous wrath,
So amiable and gracious were his ways.
And Cyrus' fourth son set the host in order;
But the fifth, Mardus, reigning in his stead,
Brought upon fatherland and monarchy
Shame and reproach. And him by subtle craft
Artaphrenes, an honourable man,
Slew in the palace, powerfully helped
By friends resolved upon the deed. And chance
Placed on my head the crown I coveted.
And with great armies I waged many wars,
But ne'er in such calamity involved

The realm: and now Xerxes, my son, because
His thoughts are a young man's thoughts, remembers not
My precepts: for I call ye all to witness,
Friends and coevals, not a man of us
Had ever by misuse of so much power
Made it the instrument of so great a woe.

CHORUS.

O King Darius, whither tends the scope
Of thy discourse? What may we thence conclude?
How may this land of Persia best emerge
From these sore trials and yet see good days?

DARIUS.

Wage no more wars 'gainst Hellas, wage no more,
Not though the Medic power were mightier yet;
For verily her soil is her ally.

CHORUS.

How sayst thou 'her ally'? How can her soil
Take arms for her and fight upon her side?

DARIUS.

The power of numbers, be they ne'er so vast,
She wears away by famine.

CHORUS.

Few and choice
Shall be the muster, with all manner store
Plentifully provided.

DARIUS.

They that are left
In Hellas even now shall not escape
Nor see their homes again.

CHORUS.

What hast thou said!
Doth not the armament of Barbary
March out of Europe over Helle's sound?

DARIUS.

Few out of many, if the oracles
Of Heaven, by warrant of these late events,
Gain credence: they are individable;
They do not fail in part, nor yet in part
Are they fulfilled. And even were they flawed
With false predictions, Xerxes, in false hopes
Confiding, hath abandoned to their fate
A vast array, the chosen of his host.
Where the Asopus watereth the plain
And maketh fat the deep Boeotian earth
They are cut off; and there is reserved for them
The culmination of their sufferings,
A just reward of pride and godless thoughts,
Because in Hellas they thought it no shame
To strip the ancient statues of the Gods
And burn their temples: yea, cast down the altars,
And from their firm foundations overthrew,
So that they lie in heaps, the builded fanes
Of unseen powers. The evil that they did
Is in like measure meted unto them,
Yea, and more shall be meted; deeper still
Lies the hid vein of suffering; yet a little
And it shall gush forth. So great shall be the carnage;
A veritable offering of blood,
Congealed with slaughter, on Plataea's plain,

The dark oblation of the Dorian spear.
High as are heaped the sands their carcases
Shall be hereafter, even to sons' sons,
A silent witness for whoso hath eyes,
That proud thoughts are not for the worm called man;
For pride in blossom, like an ear of corn,
Swells and grows ripe with ruin reaped in tears.
Ye, when ye see these things and think thereon,
Remember Athens and remember Hellas!
Let none of you, that fortune, which is yours
And which God gave, disdaining, set your hearts
On what ye have not, neither in getting more
Pour out like water vast prosperity.
Zeus is a chastener of froward wills
And he correcteth with a heavy hand.
Wherefore be ye instructors of your lord,
And with well-reasoned admonitions teach him
To have a humbler heart and cast away
The sin of pride, for it offendeth God.
And, Xerxes' dear and venerable Mother,
Return to the palace; bring forth fitting raiment
And go therewith to meet thy son: for all
About him, torn by grief, in tatters hangs
The ravelment of his rich-embroidered robe.
Moreover comfort him with gentle words;
Thee only will he hearken. I go hence
Descending through the darkness of the earth.
Farewell, grave elders; in adversity
Find out the soul's true solace day by day;
Where dead men lie wealth nothing profiteth.

[*The* SHADE *of* DARIUS *descends into the tomb.*

CHORUS.

Griefs many, woes that Barbary now endures
And shall endure hereafter wring my heart.

QUEEN.

O Fate, how endless is the train of sorrow
That entereth my soul! But there's no pang
That gnaws with keener tooth than picturing
My son, his royal person clothed wtih shame
And trappings of dishonour. I will hence
And take me handsome robes and make essay
To meet him. In the hour of evil fortune
We'll not be false to all we hold most dear.

[*Exit* QUEEN.

CHORUS.

All of earth's fullness was ours, all the spacious
Amplitude life yields or law can uphold,
When the unvanquished, the griefless, all-gracious,
Godlike Darius ruled Persia of old.

Glory of conquest and gift of good order
His statutes bestowed and our armies achieved;
Joyous and fresh they came back to our border,
In strength unexhausted, with triumph received.

What commonwealths he captive took
And never once his home forsook
Nor Halys' river passed;
Daughters of Acheloan race,
Where thunder on the shores of Thrace
Strymonian billows vast.

Beyond the marshes stretched his power,
The shadow of a fenced tower
Flung wide o'er Helle's path;
It fell on cities fair that line
Propontis' inlet lacustrine
And stormy Pontus' strath.

His were the surf-beaten islands hard by us,
Where the thrust of the land lifts the wave-flung spray;
Lesbos and Paros and Naxos and Chios
And Samos, with oil of her olive-groves gray;
Myconus's earth paid toll to Darius;
Tenos-by-Andros acknowledged his sway.

Far from both shores, where the waters divide us,
Clasped in the mid-sea's ambient kiss,
Lemnos and Icarus' isle and Cnidus,
Paphos, Rhodes, Soloe were minions of his;
And thy namesake—thy parent—O thou, whose waves hide us,
Mother of mourning, Salamis!

The portion of Javan a wise moderation
Bound to his throne by her people's decrees;
Weariless then was the might of our nation;
Countless the swarm of her mercenaries;
But now in the day of God's sore visitation
We are tamed and chastised with the stripes of strong seas.

Enter XERXES.

XERXES.

My fate is upon me;
My star hath declined;
A grief hath undone me;
A doom none divined
Hath broken the sceptre of Persia as a reed that is snapped in the wind.

Age, thine eyes chide me;
They bow down my head;
My strength is denied me;
My limbs are as lead.
Would God I lay fallen in battle, covered up out of sight with the dead!

CHORUS.

Lord of our splendour,
Our goodly array;
Despoiler and spender
And caster-away
Of thy host; God hath cut off thy lieges and darkened the light of thy day.

And Persia, their mother,
Mourns them that fell:
She, she, and none other,
Acclaimeth thee well,
King Xerxes, that gorged with her children the maw and the belly of Hell!

The pride and the power of her
Thou hast brought low:
Count the fallen flower of her,
Lords of the bow,

Reckon a myriad-muster, 'twere ten times ten thousand, I trow.

Sad lord of lost legions,
Sorrow on thee!
Through Asia's wide regions
Thy welcome shall be

Lamentation and mourning and weeping: she stoopeth; she boweth the knee.

XERXES.

Wail loud! Be not dumb!
On me be your moan!
For I am become
To kingdom and throne

A plague and a curse; yea, a burden, a weariness unto my own.

CHORUS.

O crowned desolation,
Whose stripes thy land bears;
A sore salutation
She sounds in thy ears;

Mariandyne's death-lament hails thee: the cup of thy feasting is tears.

XERXES.

Pour forth thy sorrow!
Long, long shall it flow!
Nor to-day nor to-morrow
Sufficeth thy woe.

I have felt the fierce changes of fortune; the blast of God's vengeance I know.

CHORUS.

Fraught with awe for thy fate
My weeping shall be;
Whelmed 'neath the weight
Of the weltering sea
I am fain to wail forth my lament for thy realm and thy house and for thee!

XERXES.

Ionia's embattled might,
Ionia's men-of-war,
In Ares' fatal armour dight,
Spurred by the foaming oar,
Swept men, ships, honour, all, away:
And there was left the wild waves' play
Heard in the lone of loveless night
On that disastrous shore.

CHORUS.

Woe! Woe! thrice woe!

XERXES.

Inquire of me and ask all ye are fain to know.

CHORUS.

Where, where is that great multitude,
Leal vassals of thy throne,
Pharandaces, Agabatas,
Susas and Pelagon?
Oh, tell me where is Psammis?
Where is Susiskanes,
Who from Ecbatana rode forth,—
And Dotamas?

XERXES.

All these
Aboard a ship of Tyre
Perished. Where cold waves close
Above the wreck of lost empire
I left them with their foes:
The beaded bubbles hush and hiss,
The strong tide ebbs and flows,
Bruised on the beach at Salamis,
The waves that break on Salamis
Scourge them with bitter blows.

CHORUS.

Woe! Woe! thrice woe! But tell me,
Pharnuchus, where is he?
Ariomardus and Seualkes
Whose fief was a king's fee?
And hast thou lost Lilæus,
Sprung from a noble strain?
And Tharubis and Memphis,
Are they among the slain?
Artembares,—Hystaechmas,—
For them my heart is fain.

XERXES.

Woe! Woe! thrice woe!
These many found one overthrow!
Their eyes all dim with coming death
They fixed on Athens, old, diluvial birth
Of Hate; inland on her detested earth
They gasped away their breath.

CHORUS.

A Persian of the Persians,
The very eye of thee,
Who mustered men by thousands ten
Alpistus, where is he?
The son of Batanochus,
The son of Sesamas,
The son of Megabates;—
Parthus and Oibaras,
Art thou returned without them?
And will they come no more?
And lie they there forsaken
On that disastrous shore?
Alas! what need of language?
The trouble of thy face
Proclaims this woe beyond all woes
To Persia's sceptred race!

XERXES.

Wring not my heart! Rouse not again
That insupportable refrain
For friends cut off and comrades slain.
Though sharp your pang and shrill your cry of dole
There is a louder voice that wails within my soul.

CHORUS.

But many, many more I miss!
Xanthes of Mardian clans
Chieftain; and Anchares, who led
The valiant Arians;
And Arsames and Diæxis,
Lords of the lordly steed,
And Dadacas and Lythimnas,

And Tolmus good at need,
A greedy fighter fell to fill
With the red meat of war;
I marvel that they follow not
Thy crimson-curtained car.

XERXES.

All, all have gone the darkling way
With that great host they led!

CHORUS.

All, all are gone the darkling way
Down to the unmemoried dead!

XERXES.

Forbear! This stabs me to the heart!

CHORUS.

O unseen power, whoe'er thou art,
Thou hast hurled down a gleaming woe,
Bright ruin's ghastly meteor-glow!

XERXES.

A stroke hath fallen resonant
To the last beat of time.

CHORUS.

A stroke hath fallen resonant
To earth's remotest clime.

XERXES.

O strange, new pang! Sharp agony!

CHORUS.

Ionia, mistress of the sea
We struck under an evil star;
Yea, Persia hath ill-hap in war!

XERXES.

So great a host, and all are gone!
And I am left, a thing men look upon
And weep and wail!

CHORUS.

O royal Persian!
What hast thou not lost?

XERXES.

Nay, behold and see
Of sumptuous superfluity
The poor remains: the remnant left to me!

CHORUS.

Yea, yea; thou hast lost ships, men, gear—

XERXES.

But worse remains: all Persia's power is here,
Clapped in the compass of an arrow-case!

CHORUS.

Ye gods, into how little space
Is crept thy treasure still unspent!

XERXES.

Yet in this quiver there is room enough
To hold the relics of my armament.

CHORUS.

Of bag and baggage, store and stuff,
Artillery and equipage, O King,
Hast thou brought back safe home this despicable thing?

XERXES.

All weapons else wherewith we went arrayed,
All power, and every necessary aid
That armies fight with, have been stripped away!

CHORUS.

Alack! the sons of Javan fly not from a fray!

XERXES.

They take too much delight in war!
These eyes beheld a grief they looked not for.

CHORUS.

Thy great armada, thy long battle-line
Broken——

XERXES.

When I saw that such grief was mine
From hem to hem my robe I rent.

CHORUS.

O God!

XERXES.

Cry loud with all lament!
Yea, the whole almonry of sorrow drain!
No amplest 'O' can this large ill contain.

CHORUS.

I feel a twofold, yea, a threefold chain,
And every link a fiery pain,
Constrict my heart.

XERXES.

Yea, we must weep.
And we must put on sackcloth; but the foe
On this dark anniversary shall keep
Pastime and sport, highday and holiday.

CHORUS.

And all thy strength and all thy bright array—

XERXES.

Lo! I fled naked: none escorts me home—

CHORUS.

And all thy friends and comrades cast away!
The waters of calamity flow deep;
They break in death and ruin; and they sweep
Wrecks of the wrath of God in their tumultuous foam.

XERXES.

Weep blood! Yea, with sharp nail
The lank and hollow cheek of dotage tear,
Then each man to his house.

CHORUS.

Weep! Wail!

XERXES.

Anon with me the burthen bear!

CHORUS.

Shriek for shriek and groan for groan,
In miserable antiphone!

XERXES.

Shrill forth your loud lament in unison.

XERXES AND CHORUS.

Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe!

CHORUS.

O grief the heaviest of all
To hear my lord the King's voice wailing his downfall!

XERXES.

Weep on, weep on for the King's sake;
Thy woeful service neither stint nor spare!

CHORUS.

Eyes must be wet or hearts will break.

XERXES.

Anon with me the burthen bear.

CHORUS.

Lord, I am ready to obey.

XERXES.

Wail and weep with wellaway!

CHORUS.

Wellaway! And wellaway!

XERXES AND CHORUS.

Woe! Woe! Woe!

CHORUS.

This mingled cup is mine and thine,
Foamed with the ferment of a black and bitter wine.

XERXES.

Beat thy breast and wail
The Mysian wail!

CHORUS.

Oh, wail!

XERXES.

Spare not thy silvery hairs;
Pluck out the reverend beard upon thy chin!

CHORUS.

I spare them not whom no grief spares.

XERXES.

Renew, renew thy cry! Begin
With mine your voices blending,
Let sorrow have no ending!

CHORUS.

Sorrow, sorrow hath no ending.

XERXES.

Rend thine ample train!

CHORUS.

Behold! 'tis rent in twain!

XERXES.

Touch the hair-strung lute
And teach it sorrow for my power laid low!

CHORUS.

All mournful music else be dumb and mute,
That shrill lament shall ever flow!

XERXES.

To-day and every morrow
Let fall the rain of sorrow.

CHORUS.

To-day shall have a rainy morrow.

XERXES.

Now with me the burthen bear!

CHORUS.

Woe! Woe! Woe!

XERXES.

And whence ye came with footstep slow
And cry of wail and weeping go.

CHORUS.

Woe! Woe! Woe!

XERXES.

Through all the city let your voice be sent!

CHORUS.

Through all the city one lament.

XERXES.

Groan, ye who did so delicately tread!

CHORUS.

O Persian earth, I stumble on your dead!

XERXES.

Yea, yea, yea!
In the oared galleys they were cast away!

CHORUS.

My groanings shall thine escort be!
I'll play thee home with such sad minstrelsy!

[*Exeunt*

The Seven Against Thebes

Scene: *Before the Citadel which rises in the background, crowded with altars and statues.*

Eteocles.

Burghers of Cadmus! Seasonable speech,
And apt withal, the world expects from him
Whose business is a kingdom's governance,—
High on the hinder-bulwark of the State
At lonely watch,—his hand upon the helm
And never a lull from care to latch his lids.
For, if we prosper, God shall have the thanks;
But,—if the sorry thing, I wish away,
Calamity befall,—one man, and he
My sole self Eteocles, shall hear his name
Sung to loud preludes,—universal note
Of wail,—which I pray Zeus, whom we acclaim
Averter, to keep far from Cadmus Town.
And now the hour is ripe when all of you—
Whether your prime's to come or hath gone by—
Must put on strength like buds thick-burgeoning,
Each in such measure as his age allows,
Both for the safety of the realm, her Gods—
Lest their accounted glories be wiped out,—
And for your children and this earth—the Mother
And most dear nurse of your young innocence.

For she it was, who, when as yet we sought,
Weak travellers, her hospitable door,
The kindly soil, to us large welcome gave;
The careful nurture of our nonage bare,
And bred us to be denizens-at-arms
And trusty targeteers in this her need.
And, to this day, in God's just equipoise,
To us-ward shifts the moving balance-hand;
For, long time shut within these bastioned walls,
Fair issue (under Heaven) in the main
Our warfare hath. And now, thus saith the Seer,
Who shepherds wingéd flocks; not by things burnt
Divineth he; but inly cogitates,
With deep unerring art his auguries,
By prophecy, which is the voice of God,
Divinely taught:—A fresh attack, more strong
Than all that went before, the Achæan host,
Gathering by night, intend against the town.
Therefore make speed unto the battlements
And towered gateways every man of you,
Girded with all the panoply of war!
Man the breast-works! On turret-scaffoldings
Take post! And where forth from the City-gates
The roadways run, hold on with a good heart,
Nor at this rout of runagates be ye
Too sore dismayed; for God shall end all well.
Moreover, I have despatched scouts and spies
To watch the movements of their host; the which
I am persuaded went not out in vain.
And, having their report, there is no fear
I shall be caught in any ticklish snare.

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

Eteocles! right valiant Sovereign
Of the Cadmeans! I bring tidings sure
Of happenings yonder with the armament;
Yea, and these eyes have seen what I report.
Know then, Seven Men—mettlesome Captains all—
Spilling bulls' blood in shield with black hide bound—
Their unctuous hands dipped in that gory chrism—
Have taken a great oath—unutterable—
By Enyo and Phobos that drinketh blood,
To raze these walls from battlement to base
And sack the town of Cadmus, or else die,
And leave to us our fair land soaked with carnage.
For a memorial to their folk at home
They hanged up garlands on Adrastus' car,
Weeping the while; but on their savage lips
Ruth was their none: rather the iron soul
Of stern resolve and red-hot hardihood
Panted in them, and in their lion eyes
Glanced Ares. These are no belated news;
For when I left them they were set about
Casting of lots for places at the Gates,
Against which each should march his company.
Therefore, the nation's chosen and her best
At every port assemble with all speed.
By now an Argive power of all arms
Approaches nigh at hand; the dust is stirred
With trampling feet; and their deep-chested steeds
Make the plain white with drops of creaming foam.
Now show thy seamanship, and make all snug
And weather-tight within, or e'er the blast
Of Ares strike; for on the dry land roars

A wave of men, a moving armament.
These are their dispositions: 'tis for thee
To grapple with them quickly; for the rest
My eye shall watch with sure reconnaissance
The progress of the day, and thou, well served
With sure intelligence of all without,
Shalt take no hurt nor harm. [*Exit* MESSENGER.

ETEOCLES.

Harken, O Zeus!
Earth and all tutelary Godheads, hear!
And shall I name thee, thou paternal Curse,
With dark Erinys' strong resentment armed?
O pluck not out this city by the roots,
Nor utterly destroy it, rendered up,
The prize of war! with all its settled homes
Sweet with suave fluctuance of Hellenic speech!
Grant that this free earth and King Cadmus' Town
May never pass beneath the yoke of slaves!
Help us! Our common cause methinks, I plead,
For when a happy City sees good days
Laud and great honour have the gods she worships!
[*Exit.*

The CHORUS *enter and rush up to the citadel.*

CHORUS.

I cry with great pangs of dread! For the foe quit
their camp! Yea, their forces
Are loosed as a flood is loosed! and a multitude riding
on horses
Runneth before, and mine ear no audible tidings seeks:
An airy signal flies! The dust, dumb messenger,
speaks!

Loudly the low-lying plain to their thunderous hoof-beat rings!
The sound draweth nigh! And its speed is the speed of a bird that hath wings!
It roars as waters roar down mountainous channels leaping!
Oh, raise for us your battle-cry! This evil onward sweeping
Turn back, dear Gods! Kind Goddesses, a rescue for our wall!
How the white shields of Argos gleam! How fierce this swift onfall
Of footmen doubling at the charge, in glamorous armour girt!
Oh, of all worshipped deities, who will this woe avert?
I will make haste to cast me down before your holy feet,
Ye shining shapes of old! Hail, Happy Ones, whose seat
Bideth the shock of times! This, the ripe hour to cling,
Cleaving close to your forms, why waste we way-menting?
Hear ye, or hear ye not, the bucklers clang full loud?
Proffer we now our prayers for the garlands erstwhile vowed,—
For the robes we wrought on the loom, with worship and delight!
I see—I hear—the brandished spear—and many there be that smite!
Wilt thou aid us, Ares long-in-the-land, or wilt thou thine own betray?

Dear to thee once, God golden-helmed, look down on thy city this day!

Hail, Godheads all that guard this realm and keep her fortress free!
Draw nigh! Behold! 'Gainst bondage pleads a virgin company!
For loud with hissing surges, by blasts of Ares sped,
A wave of men with combing crest our home hath compassed!
Nevertheless, O Father,—Zeus, who o'er-rulest all,
Into the toils of foemen let not their quarry fall!
Round the strong place of Cadmus the Argive beaters close!
Men harry men! The hunt is up for blood of human foes!
These bridles bind no flute-boys' cheeks, filled with soft music's breath!
They buckle bits in war-steeds' mouths! These pipes shrill woundy death!

As fell the lots helm-shaken, the pride of their great host,
Seven Champions clad in spearman's mail at the Seven Ports take post!
Hail, Power Zeus-born, that lovest battle! The city save,
Dread Pallas! Hail, Poseidon, Lord of the horse, the wave!
Smite them, as men smite fishes, even with thy forked spear!
Be for our trembling, trembling souls a strong deliverer!

O Ares! of all pity to thine own kin be kind!
Be warder of the town that calls King Cadmus' fame to mind!
Cypris, ancestress of our race! Blood of thy blood are we!
Yet none the less, as men sue Gods, we turn in prayer to thee!
Be Wolf to them, Wolf-Slayer! With gnashing of the teeth
Requite them! Leto's Daughter, thy silver bow unsheathe!
Cry, cry aloud with wailing! Hera, Mistress Supreme!
The chariots rattle round our walls! The grinding axles scream!
Oh, gracious Artemis! Shrill, shrill the note—the song of keening care!
Shook with the rush of volleying spears raves the affrighted air!

How fares it with the city? And what shall be our fate?
And whither doth God lead us? What end doth consummate?
Cry, cry aloud with wailing! Thick, thick, in soaring flight
Bursts on our walls a hail of stones! The parapet they smite!
Benign Apollo! In our gates the bronze-bound bucklers chide!
Queen—Power by Zeus appointed war's issue to decide,—
Who stand'st above our city,—Onka Invincible!

Deliver the seven-gated seat where thou art pleased
to dwell!

Hearken, O Gods and Goddesses, perfect in might and
power!
Wardens of march and mountain, watchmen on wall
and tower!
Yield not by treachery the town that toileth with the
spear,
But faithfully receive our prayer, that with stretched
hands draw near!
Loved Spirits, who, of strength to save, move striding
to and fro
Before our leaguered city, your love for her forthshow!
Think of the rich oblations upon your altars laid,
And mindful of our sacrifice and zealous service,—aid!

Enter ETEOCLES.

ETEOCLES.

Oh, you intolerable pack! You hags!
Will't help the city, think ye?—Will't inspire
A bold assurance in the beleaguered troops,
To cast you down before these antique shapes,
—Our Holy Guardians!—there to rave and howl,—
Abjects, disgusted decency abhors!
Good times, or bad times, may I never house
With womankind! The courage of a woman
Is insubmissive, rash, not counsellable,—
And, when she's timid, she's an added plague
To home and fatherland! So is it now!
Thanks to this hither, thither, to and fro
Coursing of scared feet, the faint-hearted fear,

Like to a chill tide, sounding as it goes,
Runs through all orders of the Commonweal!
And,—while the foe without are mightily
Advantaged—we ourselves within the gates
Work for our own destruction! Whoso shares
With womankind his fortunes, let him look
For the like issue! Whatsoe'er he be,
Man, woman,—or some despicable thing
Halfway betwixt them both—that from henceforth
Fails in most strict obedience to my will,
The damning pebble shall his lot decide,
And he shall publicly be stoned to death!
It longeth to a man—let womankind
Keep their own counsel and not mell with ours—
To manage matters in the world outside.
Keep within doors and thwart not our designs!
Now—hast thou heard? Or hast thou failed to hear?
Or speak I to the deaf—a girl at that?

CHORUS.

Dear Son of Oedipus! Fear smote
My heart, by reason of the din
Of chariots! For the axle's spin,
The whirring wheel's flute-note!
Because of the bit by fire begot,
That pipeth harsh with breathings hot
Of war-steeds, by the long rein swayed,
I was afraid!

ETEOCLES.

Think ye that when she labours by the head
With panic rush from high-pooped stern to prow
The seaman goes about to save his ship?

CHORUS.

I hasted to this ancient seat
because in the Gods I put my trust,
When at the gates with roaring gust
Rattled a hail of deadly sleet.
Then was I moved by fear to pray
Unto the Blessed Gods, that they
Might stretch to shield the town from harm
A mighty arm.

ETEOCLES.

Pray rather that the battlemented walls
Stand proof against the thrust of foeman's spear.
For were not that behoofful to the Gods?
'Tis a true saying: When a city falls
The Gods forsake their ancient habitations.

CHORUS.

Not in my time, thou honourable Court
Of Gods, forsake the city: ere that day
When battle riots where her sons resort,
And flames devour her, take my life away!

ETEOCLES.

Let me not hear thee call on the good Gods
When thy base heart deviseth cowardice!
The mother of Good-Hap is Loyalty,
The proverb saith; Helpmeet of Him that Saves!

CHORUS.

Save it he may; yet him God's power transcends;
And often out of rough adversity,
Cloud-wrack above us, where the visual ends,
Man's helplessness God stablisheth on high.

ETEOCLES.

These be men's matters,—blood of sacrifice,
Offerings to oracles, when deedy war
Puts all things to the test; your business
Is submiss silence, and to bide within.

CHORUS.

It is the Gods who keep yet unsubdued
The land wherein we dwell; our walléd town
Unravaged of this arméd multitude:
Shall what we do then call their vengeance down?

ETEOCLES.

I grudge not that to the high heavenly race
Ye pay all honour: but, lest ye corrupt,
As cravens can, the manhood of the realm
Calm your wild transports; this is fear's excess.

CHORUS.

The sudden girding on of warlike gear
Confused upon my startled senses came,
Confounding them the more; surprised by fear
I sought this castled crag of ancient fame.

ETEOCLES.

I charge ye, if they tell of wounds and death
Fasten not on the tale with frantic cries,
For human carnage is God Ares' meat.

CHORUS.

I hear the neighing steeds!

ETEOCLES.

Hear if thou must!
Yet seem not so discernibly to hear!

CHORUS.

The builded city groans,—as if a voice
Spake from the ground! Oh, we are compassed in
On every side!

ETEOCLES.

Is't not enough that I
With all resources wisdom can command
Confront these perils?

CHORUS.

Loud and louder yet!—
The knocking at the gate!

ETEOCLES.

Stifle thy cries!
Must the whole city hear thee?

CHORUS.

O ye Gods,
Keep troth! Betray not to the enemy
The City ye have promised to defend!

ETEOCLES.

Curse thee! Wilt hold thy peace—possess thy soul
In patience?

CHORUS.

O divine co-denizens,
Free while ourselves are free, save me from bondage!

ETEOCLES.

Ye do enslave yourselves; country and king,
Ye make both thrall!

CHORUS.

O Zeus Omnipotent!
Strike the foe dead—dead—with thy bolt!

ETEOCLES.

O Zeus!
What stuff is woman made of, whom thou gav'st
To man for helpmeet!

CHORUS.

Blithesome are we not;
And are men merrier when kingdoms fall?

ETEOCLES.

Thy hand upon the holy images
Speak'st thou untowardly with thy tongue?

CHORUS.

My fears
Are masters and my tongue a run-away.

ETEOCLES.

If I cannot command let me entreat.
Come! With a good grace grant me my request,
And let this quarrel have a gentle close.

CHORUS.

Speak with all speed then: haply thou shalt have
As speedy answer.

ETEOCLES.

Hush, poor weeping wretch,
Or thou wilt scare thy friends.

CHORUS.

Nay, I am dumb:
The fate that they must suffer I can endure.

ETEOCLES.

I more approve that utterance of thine
Than all that went before: but stop not there!
Away from these sequestered images,
And pray to nobler purpose! Say, 'Ye Gods,

'Make war upon our side!' When ye have heard
The prayer I have to offer, second it
With songs triumphant, lusty, of good cheer—
The sacrificial shout that Hellas knows,—
A salutation to embolden friends
And from their souls the battle-fright cast loose!
Hear, then, my prayer. First, I vow to the Gods,
Custodians of polity and soil,
Wardens of field and meeting-place and mart;
Next unto Dirce's river-springs,—nor less
Ismenus, do I mean to honour thee,—
If fair befall us and the State be saved,
There shall be slaughtering of bulls; the blood
Of sheep shall redden the hearth-place of the Gods.
Thus I confirm by pledge of solemn speech
Mine oath, to them trophies and raiment vowing:—
'I will bedeck your shrines inviolate,
'Yea, hang the forecourts of your sanctuaries
'With spoils spear-rent, the garments of our foes.'
On this wise pray ye! Thus acceptably
Approach the Gods with vows; not to vain groans
Addict, beast noises not articulate,
Untutored transports, ineffectual;
For by such flights ye shall no whit the more
Flee the appointed portion. I meanwhile
Will get me forth: and post at the Seven Gates
To match the foe six men of might and mettle,
Myself the seventh,—furnished in the style
Greatness approves; ere rumour improvised
Inform them, or with speedier argument
Extremity of need inflame their souls.

[THE CHORUS *comes down from the Citadel on to the stage.*

CHORUS.

Fain would I hearken, fain obey,
But my heart's calm slumber-beat dismay
And dread have troubled sore:
And care (ill neighbour I wish away)
Looks in at the open door;
And the trembling flame of fear is fed
Because of the walls encompasséd,
As trembles the dove for her nestling's sake,
For her cradled brood, when the cruel snake
Creeps to their twilight bed.

Hither in complete armour dight
Moveth against these towers
A multiple host; and yonder light
The jagged sling-stone showers.
And our people are smitten from far and near,
And I know not my fate, but I tremble and fear,
And I pray the Gods of race divine
To save the men of Cadmus' line
And the city to Cadmus dear.

Where to redeem your loss shall be found
In earth's wide fields more fertile ground,
If ye yield this land to the foe,
Where, through the deep, rich soil enwound,
The waters of Dirce flow?
Nourisher she of man and mead,
Quencher of thirst and quickener of seed;
No rill more excellent in worth

Of all Poseidon Lord of Earth
Poureth or Tethys' children speed.
Therefore, ye Gods, that are our stay,
Yonder without the wall
Send havoc;—with slaughter and casting away
Of shields, when slain men fall:
But dismiss not our prayers unheard, disowned,
Our lamentable cry entoned:
Save us and win for our land renown;
Then reign within the walléd town
Unshakeably enthroned!

Sorrow it were thus to send down to hell a city coeval with grandeurs of old
Captive and spoil of an enemy spear, 'mid the crumbling of ashes; her store and her gold
Sacked by the Achaean as things of no worth, unregarded of Heaven; sore sorrow it were
Should mother and matron and maiden and bride as a horse by the forelock be haled by the hair
With rending of raiment. Loud, loud is the voice of a city made empty: her children's farewells—
As they go to their ruin—confused with exultings; and heavy the doom that my fear foretells.
Woe for the lawless reaping of unripe corn; for the rape of the bride unwed,
For the far strange home and the long, long way to it, travelled with hate, she must tread!
Nay, of a truth, where dead men dwell, there is more of bliss; for with multiple ills
When a city is taken man visiteth man; he leads away captive, he spills

Blood, he thrusts in fire; he anoints with defilement of
smoke man's home;
The soul of all reverence a mad breath pollutes when
Ares hath masterdom!

Tumult and roaring in all streets and wynds;
The fencéd bulwark fails; and man to man each finds
His foe; and, having found
Lets drive his spear and bears him to the ground.
And blood-bedabbled mothers of babes new-born
For their dead sucklings like the ewe-flock bleat;
By harrying bands
Kindred from kin are torn;
And two shall meet
Each with his load; or one with empty hands
Shall call upon his fellow in like case,
Neither with less nor equal satisfied,
Saying 'Since all men for themselves provide,
'How shall we fare if backward in the race?'

All manner store the housewife's eyes distress,
Chance-lying where it fell: all earth's largesse
Foamed recklessly to waste.
And, new to sorrow, with worse bonds disgraced,
The young girl-slave looks for a conqueror's bed;—
A rich lord, yet in love most destitute,
Whose only mark
Of greatness is the slaver's attribute,
When fierce embraces in the lustful dark
Exact with nightly ravishment his pay;
And her bewailéd griefs find this redress
That tears let fall in day-long loneliness,
Night's all-abhorred endearments wipe away!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look where our spy comes! Dear ones, he brings tidings
Be certain, of some happening with the host!
With smoothest expedition at high speed
He runneth thither, as the hubbed wheel spins!

And see! With juncture apt to meet his news,
The king himself, the Son of Œdipus!
He, too, all haste, metes out no measured stride!

Enter MESSENGER *and* ETEOCLES.

MESSENGER.

I bring news—certain—of the enemy,
How the lots fell and at which port each stands.
Fell Tydeus—foremost—fronts the Proetid Gate,
Roaring; but may not pass Ismenus Ford:
The seer forbids: the omens are not good.
There greedy Tydeus, famishing for fight,
Sends forth his voice, like to a venomous snake
Hissing at noon; and lasheth with vile words
The prophet, Œcles' son: damning his lore
For cringing cowardice that shrinks from death
And jeopardy of battle: while he vents
Such blasphemy, he tosses his dwarf-head
All overshadowed with a triple crest,
His bright helm's bristling mane. Beneath his shield,
From its dished rondure dangling, bells of bronze
A yelling menace peal: the broad convex,
Bulging, displays this arrogant device:—
The sky in metal wrought, ablaze with stars:

And in the middle of his shield the moon,—
Lustrous, full-orbed, leader and paramount
Of all their constellations,—looketh forth,
The very eye of night. And like one wood,
Thus in prodigious pride caparisoned,
He holloas up and down the river-bank,
Rampant with lust of battle; as a horse
All fire and fierceness pants upon the bit,
What time, hard-held, he paweth in his place
Mad for the sound of trumpet. Whom wilt thou
To him oppose? What champion safe and sure
Shall stand at Proetid Port, the barriers down?

ETEOCLES.

I am not one to tremble at a plume:
'Tis not the brave device that deals the scar,
And crests and bells without the spear bite not.
As for this night that's blazoned on his shield,
This heaven of shining stars,—the folly of it
Will likely prove a night of prophecy.
For if Death's bloody darkness veil his eyes,
Then, for the bearer of that scutcheon proud,
By herald's law these arms are his by right,
And his presumptuous scutcheon damns himself!
'Gainst Tydeus I will post the valiant son
Of Astacus for champion of the Gate.
Right nobly born is he, and one who pays
Due honour to the throne of Modesty,
Abhorrer of the bombast rhetoric;
Backward in baseness he holds honour dear.
Sprung from that seed of men which Ares spared,
A goodly plant, most native to this soil,

Is Melanippus. Ares may decide
With hazard helm-cast how the event shall speed;
But Justice by sure warranty of blood
Commits to him in trust the life of her
Who gave him birth, to shield from thrust of foes.

CHORUS.

Just is his cause who fights for his land! Him may the just Gods prosper and speed!
Yet I see the pale forms of our loved ones lie bleeding, and tremble; for us, their belovéd, they bleed!

MESSENGER.

May the Gods grant your prayer—and prosper him!
Electrae Portals fell to Capaneus.
Another Earth-born he,—in height surpassing
The last,—and his proud boast too proud for man.
He monstrously inveighs against these walls
With threats, which may the event forbear to crown!
On this wise boasteth he: 'With or without
God's will, by me the City shall be sacked!
Though Zeus dispute my passage, casting down
His lightning for a stumbling-block of fire,
It lets me not!' He scorns your thunderbolt!
Your forkéd lightning he dubs 'noonday heat!'
And, for device, carries a firebearer,—
An unarmed man,—for weapon in his hands
A blazing torch; and, issuing from his mouth,
This golden challenge, 'I will fire the town.'
Do thou despatch 'gainst such a champion—
But who will stand against him? Who will bide
The man with all his vaunts and never blench?

ETEOCLES.

Gain upon gain, and interest to boot!
The hearts of frenzied men are in their mouths:
The tongue's the true accuser of false thoughts.
When Capaneus threatens he's prepared to act
His blasphemies; and when he dareth all
That tongue may dare, with insane zest the man
Challenges heaven and storms the ear of Zeus
With swelling words. But he shall have, y-wis,
Fit answer, when that firebearer comes
Which is the burning bolt, fashioned no wise
In likeness to the warmth of noonday sun.
'Gainst him a man, exceeding slow of speech,
In spirit very fire, we have set;
The might of Polyphontes; a strong tower
By favour of protecting Artemis
And other Gods withal. Pray you proceed:
Another and the gate that he hath drawn.

CHORUS.

Death to the braggart! Fall, thunder, and stay him!
ere with leaping he come and with lifting of spear
To despoil my fair home, my virginal bower,— robber
and wrecker and ravisher!

MESSENGER.

Now for the next gate and the man that drew it:
The third cast fell upon Eteoclus;
Third from the upturned helm, goodly with bronze,
For him leapt forth the lot to hurl his troop
Against Neistae Portals. Round and round
He reins his mares, and they toss high their heads
With gleam of glancing harness,—all on fire
To fall upon the Gate. Their nozzles pipe

After the mode of barbarous music, filled
With the breath of their proud snortings. On his targe
Is no mean blazon. One armed cap-à-pie
Climbs up a ladder planted 'gainst a tower,
Held by the foe, and means to lay all waste.
In syllables forth-gushing from his lips
He roars 'Not Ares' Self shall hurl me down.'
'Gainst him too send a trusty one, to save
This land of freemen from the servile yoke.

ETEOCLES.

Here is the man to send, and with him go
Such happy fortune as the Gods vouchsafe!
Not in his mouth his boast, but in his arm.
Megareus, Creon's seed, of the race earth-sown.
The savage, greedy noise of neighing steeds
Shall not affright nor drive him from the Gates;
But either he will fall and with his life
This land for her dear nurture recompense,
Or deck his father's house with two-fold glory:
Two captives taken and that shield-borne tower,
So proudly counterfeited, carried home.
Another boaster: stint me not your tale!

CHORUS.

Good luck, good luck have thou who go'st forth,
Champion of home to me! Foul them befall!
Mouthing in madness beneath our wall,
Zeus the Requiter behold them with wrath.

MESSENGER.

Next—fourth in order—to the Gate hard by
Athena Onca comes Hippomedon
Shouting his war-shout: a resplendent shape,

Cast in a mould of ample magnitude.
His shield might almost serve for a threshing-floor;
And while its round he threateningly revolved
I own a shudder ran through all my frame.
No despicable artist was the man
Who wrought its blazon. On the disk embossed
A Typhon, shooting forth his burning breath,—
A luminous darkness, half smoke and half fire;
The casing of its hollow-bellied orb
Securely hammered on with knots of snakes.
I heard his great voice thunder,—saw his eyes
Glare horribly: a frenzied votarist
He leaped, God Ares' reeling reveller,
By him possessed, mad-drunk for deeds of blood:
'Gainst his assault there needeth wary watch.
Even now before the Gates his vaunt is loud,
And swelling with the note that strikes dismay.

ETEOCLES.

Suburban Pallas—Onka-Without-the-Walls—
Hard by the Gate, wroth with his insolence,
Shall keep him off,—a serpent, mailed and fanged,
Death in its coils, barred from a brood of birds.
But Oenops' trusty son, Hyperbius,
For mortal succour,—matching man with man—
Shall face him. All he asked was choice for service;
Time and the hour should teach him where to serve.
Faultless in form; of fearless courage, perfect
In martial trim, never did Hermes cast
A luckier throw than when with happy choice
He brought the pair together: for betwixt
Him and the man he meets is enmity,

And in the smiting of their shields shall clash
Opposing deities. For the one presents
Typhon that breathes forth fire; but Father Zeus
Sits on the other, moveless on his throne,
And centred in his hand the bolt that burns!
And who hath yet seen Zeus discomfited?
These are the powers whose favour they invoke,
We with the winners, with the losers they,
If Zeus be more than Typhon's match in battle!
Yea, by his blazon each shall stand or fall;
And Zeus displayed upon his shield shall prove
Zeus the strong Saviour to Hyperbius!

CHORUS.

He whose arm Zeus' enemy sustains,—
Monster unfriended, Earth whilome bore,
Whom demons and Gods and mortals abhor,—
Right at the Gate he shall dash out his brains!

MESSENGER.

Amen to that. Next in the list and fifth
In order, at the Gates of Boreas,
Hard by Amphion's Tomb, the son of Zeus,
This champion takes ground. A spear he hath
Whereby he sweareth,—honouring it more
Than any God,—yea, holding it more dear
Than eyesight: 'I will ravage Cadmus Town,
Ay, maugre Zeus'! Thus he,—a cub, whose dam
Littered among the mountains,—a green chit,
Yet of a comely countenance withal,
Man-boy, or boy-man—call him what you will,—
The down upon his cheeks buds thick and fast,—
For 'tis with him the spring-time of his growth,—

But of a savage temper—in no wise
Maidenly, as befits his name—he strode,
His eyeballs rolling,—not without his boast
Advancing to the Gates. Our infamy
On his bronze shield, orbed to protect his bulk,
He flashed :—the ogrish Sphinx,—so riveted
That its embossed and staring ugliness
His arm convulsed to hideous counterfeit
Of life and motion. Underneath he sports
The figure of a man—a wight Cadmean—
As if on him to centre all our bolts!
He'll prove no petty trafficker in war,—
Nor for a bagman's profit lose his travel,—
Parthenopaeus, waif of Arcady!
Oh, that a rogue like this,—an outlander
In Argos, one who pays his reckoning,
A handsome sum for being handsome-bred,
Should hurl against these walls his boyish spite
And spleenful threats, I pray God bring to naught!

ETEOCLES.

If the same measure that they mete the Gods
Be meted out to them, then their bad vows
Shall hurl them far in hopeless overthrow!
But for him too, your churl Arcadian,
A knight is found: no braggart,—but his hand
Soon finds the thing to do! Actor his name,
Brother of him just chosen. No foul flood
Of deedless words will he let flow within
To water pale, rank weeds of cowardice;
Nor will he suffer to overpass these walls
The man who comes in guise of foe, escutcheoned

With that abhorréd beast! She shall be wroth
With him that carries her, when, at our gates,
The too industrious hammerstoke of war
Her bulging blazon dints with rude reverse!
Nevertheless, I leave it to the Gods!
And may they prove that I speak verity!

CHORUS.

This rives my heart! Ruffles my braided locks
Until each hair with horror stands up stiff!
Blasphemy of unholy men that mocks
Things holy! O ye Gods—if—if
Ye be indeed Gods that requite,
Smite them! with ruin smite!

MESSENGER.

I am near ended. Sixth there came a man
In temper most majestical, in might
Excelling all—the prophet, Amphiaraus.
Before the Homoloean Gates he stood
Chiding great Tydeus with much eloquence.
'Assassin! Troubler of the public peace!
In Argos arch-preceptor of all wrong!
Erinys' call-boy! Slaughter's acolyte!
Organ of evil counsel to the soul
Of old Adrastus'! Then he called aloud
The name of Polyneices—thy blood-brother,—
And lifting up his eyes to Heaven, paused—
An awful pause—on that last syllable
That speaks of strife. And thus his thoughts break loose:
'Doubtless, this is a deed to please the Gods,—

A noble gest, which they who come hereafter
Will much delight to tell or harken to:—
To wreck thy father's kingdom and thy Gods,
Hurling upon them an invading host!
Is it in Justice' name thou would'st drain dry
The fount that flowed for thee with mother's milk?
And if thou master with thy jealous sword
Thy fatherland, how will it profit thee?
I shall make fat this earth! Yea, prophesy
Here in my grave, in hostile ground interred.
On then to battle! And for me—to death
Not all unhonoured'! So the prophet spake,
His shield of bronze at rest. It bore no blazon:
For his affections hang not on the show
Of seeming to be best, but being so!
And he reaps only where the soil hath depth
The golden wisdom of well-pondered thought!
My counsel is that thou despatch against him
Antagonists as wise as they are brave;
He's to be feared who reverences the Gods!

ETEOCLES.

This moves me much! 'Tis the unhappy chance
That couples oft the just with many wicked!
In the affairs of men no ill compares
With bad associates! There springeth thence
A crop no man would harvest. The field of Sin
Brings forth the fruits of Death. For, peradventure,
One righteous man who reverences the Gods
Shall shipmate be with a ruffianly crew,
And, furthering some scheme of villainy,
Perish with the whole tribe by God accursed!

Or, in a state where cynic policy
Goes the broad way of international crime,
And men forget the Gods, there shall be found
One just man, who, though he hath done no wrong,
Caught in the snare of his compatriot's guilt,
Falls, smitten with the chastisement of Heaven
That visiteth them all! So is it now
With the seer, Œcles' son! A man most staid,
Just, valiant, God-fearing, greatly endowed
With prophecy, but 'gainst his better mind
Consorting with blasphemers, when they take
The road which to retrace is hard and long,—
He, if it be the will of Zeus, shall fall
With all his bad confederates dragged down!
I do not think he will so much as move
Against the Gates; not that he lacks the courage
Or is at heart attaint with cowardice,
But having certain knowledge of the way
The fight must end for him; if the oracle
Of Loxias bear fruit; and he is wont
To speak to purpose if he speak at all.
Nevertheless, I make choice of a man
To send against him, valiant Lasthenes:
He keepeth on the stranger at the Gate
A jealous ward: in wisdom of ripe years
But of a youthful brawn yet immature.
A man so quick of eye, so sure of hand,
That instant through the undefended flesh
Crashes his spear, if aught that's vulnerable
Be left uncovered at the buckler's edge.
Howbeit, howsoe'er we thrust or fend
Victory is a gift men owe to Heaven.

CHORUS.

May the Gods hear our prayers, for they are just;
And grant them for the safety of our land;
And be the invader's weapon backward thrust,
Yea, in his own breast with a mighty hand!
On them may Zeus his bolt let fall
Yonder without the wall!

MESSENGER.

Last name of all—seventh at the seventh Gate—
Thy brother! Hear what woes his prayers invoke
On thee and on this realm! He'll plant his foot
Upon our walls: our land shall hear his name
Heralded; the loud paean he will uplift.
Yea, he will seek thee out and slay thee first,
Then die beside thee! Or 'If he fall not,
But live; exile for exile, wrong for wrong,
Measure for measure! "As he drove me out,
So shall he wander forth a fugitive."
And for the fair fulfilment of these hopes
He invocates the Gods that knit in love
Each to his kin and all men to their home.
Well named is he 'the Mighty One in Quarrel'!
A new-wrought shield he bears—the Argive buckler,
Round, with two-fold device artificered.
Hammered in gold a man completely armed
Led by a woman-form of sober mien.
Justice he calls her; suiting to that name
Her legend, 'I will bring home the banished man:
He shall possess his land, and come and go,
Free of his father's house.' Here ends the tale
Of all their proud inventions: make thy choice

Whom thou wilt send against him. And as I
Will be the faithful herald of thy word,
Prove thou true Captain of the Ship of State!

[*Exit* MESSENGER.

ETEOCLES.

O house of Œdipus! *Our* house! O race
God-maddened—God-abominate—all tears!
Oh me! here ends,—here ends my father's curse!
And yet this is no time to weep and wail,
Lest sorrow's debt with usury of sorrow
Gender increase of groans! 'Mighty in Quarrel'!
Well-named! Well-named! Ay, we shall know anon
Where it will end, that blazon,—we shall know
Whether the gilded rant, writ on his shield
And fraught with frenzy, will fetch the bearer home!
If the maid Justice, Zeus' own child, had been
The inspiration of his thoughts,—had lent
Her countenance to his deeds, this might have been!
But neither when from antenatal gloom
He fled—at nurse, in adolescence, nor
When's beard grew thick, did Justice ever own him
Or speak him fair! Nor is it credible
That in this hour when perils thicken fast
To whelm his fatherland, she stands beside him!
No! Justice is Justice! She were falsely named
Succouring such a miscreant! In this faith
I go to meet him! Who hath better right?
Ay, king to king, and brother unto brother,
Foe matched with foe! My greaves! Fetch me my
greaves!
Good gear 'gainst javelin-thrust or cast of stone!

CHORUS.

Be not, belovéd—child of Œdipus—
Like unto him out of whose mouth proceeds
All wickedness! Alas! It is enough
If our Cadmeans with these Argives fight:
There's water for that blood; but brother-murder
Is like the tettered slough that will not off:
'Tis spotted with the guilt that ne'er grows old!
If evil come, so it be free from shame,
Why let it come. All titles else save honour
Die when we die and sleep with us in the grave:
But if to evil thou add infamy
How shall men speak it fair and call it honest?

Child, what crav'st thou? Let not the battle-lust
Bloody with dripping spears thy ruin be!
Forth from thy soul the evil passion thrust
Or e'er it mount apace and master thee!

ETEOCLES.

Since in this power that speeds the event I feel
The insupportable blast of God's own breath,
Blow, wind! Fill, sails! And where Cocytus' tide
Heaves dark, with gleams of Phoebus' fiery hate,
Down-wind let drift the last of Laius' line!

CHORUS.

This is some fierce unnatural appetite
That hungers after flesh unseethed and raw!
Famished for human victims! The loathed rite
Whose fruit is sour, whose blood sins 'gainst the law!

ETEOCLES.

It is my father's curse! I feel the glare
Of those hard eyes not moist with human tears!

To do things horrible they importune me!
There is a voice which cries 'Swift death were sweet!'

CHORUS.

Hear it not, child! No man shall call thee base
If on thy life there dawn a better day!
Hereafter, if the Gods thy offerings grace,
Will not black-stoled Erinys steal away?

ETEOCLES.

What are the Gods to me! Methinks the hour
When we regarded them is long gone by!
No offering in their eyes is of such worth
As our perdition! Why then pay them court?
Why cringe for respite from the final doom?

CHORUS.

Yield now, while yet thou hast the chance! The wind
May change with time, that blows so contrary,
And thy bad Genius at last be kind!
But now thou battlest with a boiling sea!

ETEOCLES.

Ay! with the yeasty waves of Œdipus
His curse! There was too much of solid sooth
In the slight, fleeting visions of my dreams:
They make division of my father's substance!

CHORUS.

Thou art no friend to woman: yet, wilt hear me?

ETEOCLES.

If thou hast ought to say a man may do,
Speak on; and in few words withal!

CHORUS. Go not
Where thou art going—to the Seventh Gate!

ETEOCLES.

Content thee! Therefore have I filed my mind;
And words are not the stuff to dull its edge.

CHORUS.

To win is all: get glory he who can:
The victory won wins God's acknowledgment.

ETEOCLES.

He who girds on his armour owes no love
To that wise saw.

CHORUS.

And yet the greater fault—
To lay rash hands upon thy brother's life
And with those crimson juices stain thy soul—
Mislikes thee not!

ETEOCLES.

Sin may be thrust upon us:
Evil when Heaven sends it, who shall shun? [*Exit.*

CHORUS.

By this cold shuddering fit of fear
My heart divines a presence here,
Goddess or Ghost yclept;
Wrecker of homes, and dark adept
Of prophecy, whose vastitude of ill
This hour and all hours shall at last fulfil.
Thou Curse that from the gloom
Of nether Hell
A Sire invoked; implacable
Erinys, whom in fierce excess of wrath
Grief-maddened Œdipus did summon forth,
Thou'rt in this strife to work his children's doom.

Ah, stranger from the far-off land,—
Scyth—Chalyb—in thine iron hand
The lots are shaken; thine award
Is dealt with the devouring sword,
Whose biting edge doth make partition cold
Of all the goodly gear men get and hold.
With them so shall it be,
These, next of kin
In blood and guilt and sin,
Of all their father's famous fields widespread
They shall at last be disinherited,
Lords of so much earth as dead men have in fee.

When children, by one sire begot,
To whom one woeful womb gave birth,
In mortal combat meet and die,
And that bright pool wherein they lie
Drunk by the dust of thirsty earth
Is curdled to a darker clot,
What power of prayer shall purify,
What water wash away the stain?
But, ah, what drops incarnadine
The new, the old, the mingled wine,
That Laius' house must drain!

From springs of old transgression flow
The guilt, the sorrow swift to follow.
Not yet, not yet is vengeance spent,
Son's sons abide the chastisement
Of him who hearkened not Apollo,—
Laius, first-parent of this woe.
Three sacred embassies he sent,
And thrice where Delphic rocks are piled,

Of earth's vast wheel the massy nave,
The priestess cried 'If thou would'st save
Thy kingdom, get no child.'

But Love was master; he begot
Death for himself and shame,
The son that slew him, witting not,—
King Œdipus his name.
Who eared the womb where he lay hid,
Seed of a curse unborn,
Sowing the sacred field forbid
To reap in blood the corn.
Their bridal torch Erinys fed,
And madness strewed their nuptial bed.

And now, as 'twere a sea of woe
That may not come to rest,
Wave follows after wave; and, lo,
A third with triple crest
That breaks with moaning thunder stored
About the ship of State;
Scarce wall-wide is the weather-board
Stretched betwixt us and Fate;
And I have fears lest Cadmus Town,
Whelmed with its royal house, go down!

Like an old debt unpaid is an ancient curse:
And in the soul's commerce
It comes to audit, hath its settling day:
A heavy reckoning for man to pay
When not one damning entry is passed by.
From deck to keelson there is rummage then
And jettison of wealth of moiling men,
Waxed fat with overmuch prosperity.

This was well seen in Œdipus ill-starred.
High in the Gods' regard
He stood; by the fireside of him was laud;
In streets and squares where'er men walk abroad
Or great assemblies gather in debate,
Was never wight so praised, what time he smote
The she-fiend, gobbling down her gory throat
Comers and goers at the City Gate.

But on his noonday broke a ghastly light;
And, sounding all the sorrow of his wooing,
One final grief he wrought to his undoing
With that same hand that laid his father low;
And put away the eyes that gave him sight
Of his loathed offspring, gotten to his woe.

And then he cursed them (for they grudged him bread);
With bitter words of grief and anger chiding:
'A day shall come, a day of sharp dividing,
And he that carves shall carve with steel,' he cried.
Now the curse falls upon his children's head,
And my hushed heart awaits Erinys' stride.

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

Take courage, weak ones! Mother's children all!
This free land hath escaped the yoke of slaves.
The boastings of the mighty are brought low:
The ship is in still waters: wave on wave
Smote her, but her stout seams have sprung no leak;
Sound are her bulwarks; her ports weather-tight;
Her champions have well-discharged their trust.
Count gate by gate and six have prospered well;
And for the seventh—Apollo, Lord of Seven,

Took that by right of his prerogative:
And there he fitly stayed the Laian rage.

CHORUS.

Is not the measure of her mourning full?
And must this stricken realm find room for more?

MESSENGER.

The realm is safe: but, for her princely seed—

CHORUS.

I dread so much the thing thou hast to say
I scarce attend thee; what dost thou mean? Speak on!

MESSENGER.

If thou hast power to listen, mark my words.
The Sons of Œdipus—

CHORUS.

Oh, Misery!
They say prophets of evil utter truth,
And I am of them!

MESSENGER.

Indistinguishably
They have gone down into the dust.

CHORUS.

So far
Fallen! Thy tale is heaviness; nevertheless
Tell it to the end!

MESSENGER.

I tell thee they are dead:
They slew each other!

CHORUS.

Ah, fraternal hands!
Too near were ye in birth, too near in blood.

MESSENGER.

Yea! And their undivided destiny
Twinned them in death: their evil Genius slew them,
And blotted from the world an ill-starred race.
Such cause we have for thankfulness and tears;
The land is well at ease; that twin-born pair,
Lords and disposers of the Commonwealth,
Have made partition with the hammered steel,
Tough Scyth, of all their substance, scot and lot,
And they shall hold it indefeasibly,
Quieted in possession by the grave!
There, to that final resting place borne down
By the dark current of a father's curse.
The realm is safe: dark earth hath drunk their blood,
The royal blood that like twin fountains rose;
One hour of birth—one hour of combat—one
Of death—dealt mutually by fraternal hands.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.

CHORUS.

O Sovran Zeus, Protecting Powers,
Who have indeed kept safe these well-beloved towers,
Whether shall I rejoice
For that the city stand inviolate
Or shall I rather with a lamentable voice
Weep and bewail her leader's fate?
Ah, cruel doom! Ah, children dead!
Mighty in Quarrel ye have ended
Even as the name portended,
Yea, in your wickedness ye are perished.

O curse of Œlipus! O malison
Dark—unrelenting—damning all his line!
Over this heart of mine
Comes creeping on,
Cold Misery, your chilly breath,
Because, when like a Thyiad in her madness
I seemed to hear
The blood that drips
Where men lie slain,
Then with the voice of mourning and with rueful lips
I sang the song of death!
O ill refrain,
Glee chanted without mirth or gladness,
That keeps a sorry burden to the spear.

Rather the word, the never wearying
Once uttered malediction of their sire,
Wrought to this issue dire.
Nay, Laius King
Hath here his wish; the course he chose
Begun in blindness and in disobeying
Toucheth its bourne.
Ambitions high
And cares of State
Blunt not the edge of heavenly prophecy.
O, wailed for many woes,
Past belief in hate
And past belief in fratricidal slaying,
Is this a tale or is it sooth we mourn?

[*The bodies of* ETEOCLES *and* POLYNEICES *are borne on to the Stage.*]

Behold! self-manifest they come;
They need no harbinger;
A double woe, a mutual doom,
Care that hath slaughtered care.
New sorrows from old sorrows spring,
And both have here their home-bringing.

Ah! pilgrim-ship, your lofty poop
No festal garlands wreathe:
The drowsy sails half idly droop,
And they are dark as death:
Bound where no sunny Cyclads shine,
And bright Apollo hath no shrine.

Waft, waft her down the wind of sighs,
With speed of plangent hand
Row her beyond these happy skies
Unto the sunless land,—
Where across Acheron voices call,
And region darkness welcomes all.

Enter ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.

But dearer lips must chant their threnody;
And that unhappy cause
Here to their brethren draws
A sister pair, the maid Antigone,
Ismene by her side. Tears may be sold,
And raiment rent for mercenary gold
And money purchaseth the hireling's cries:
These warm, white breasts shall heave with heartfelt sighs;

But ere the dirge begin, let us prolong
With well accordant breath
Erinys' loud, harsh, unmelodious song,
The dismal paean of the Lord of Death.

Unhappy sisters, most unblest
Of all that e'er held brother dear,
Or bound beneath a tender breast
The cincture noble women wear;
From feignéd grief no forced lament I borrow;
The heart's voice speaks when I shrill forth my sorrow.

O ye perverse, to counsel blind
Ye weariless in woe!
Must courage turn its hand 'gainst kind,
Power its own house lay low?
And sought ye death or sought ye doom
And ruin for your house and home?

Her princely walls ye tumbled flat;
In rivalry for her
A bitter monarchy ye gat,—
The sword your peacemaker.
Sceptred Erinys keeps your house,
Wreaking the wrath of Œdipus.

Oh, ill encounter! Fellowship
Of hands that hatred joins!
The drops that from these gashes drip
Flow from the self-same loins!
Woe for the curse with Heaven allied,
Red with the blood of fratricide!

Oh gaping wound, still bleeding fresh:
O rent that ruined all,
And thrusting through fraternal flesh
Struck home at house and hall.
One bitter curse for both; yea, none
Hath less or more of malison!

Realm-wide the sound of mourning runs:
The bastioned walls make moan;
This earth that loveth her strong sons
Sends up a hollow groan;
And all they perished to possess
Waiting new heirs lies ownerless.

Too keen their cause to prosecute,
Too jealous for just share;
And he who solved their bitter suit
Think ye that he judged fair?
Ares that judgeth by the sword,—
Small thanks hath he for his reward!

To battle they had made appeal,
And battle heard their cause;
That iron judge, the trenchant steel,
Hath brought them to this pause,
In undisturbéd tenure cold
Their father's grave to have and hold!

Loud is my wail! My heart is rent
With grief's authentic cry!
No gladness lurks in this lament,
Feigned grief false thoughts belie!
The fountains of my being flow
For royal men in death laid low!

How shall we praise them? Shall we say
Their own should love them well,
Seeing they wrought much in their day,
Were wondrous hospitable?
When host met host, the pledge was graced;
They lavished all—in laying waste!

O crown of women, woe-begone!
Of mothers, most unblest!
Who took to husband her own son,
And suckled at her breast
Babes, that in mutual slaughter bleed:
Here ends that sowing—and the seed!

Yea, in their seed-time they were twinned,
And clove in twain by hate
They are clean gone—a stormy wind
Hath swept them to their fate:
Such peace-making these brawlers have,
And their conclusion is the grave.

There they forget to hate: their strife
Springs to no fierce rebirth:
The sundered rivers of their life
Mingle in peaceful earth;
And in that dark, distempered clay
Too near, too near in blood are they.

Alack! The alien of the sea,
Keen iron, fire's own child,
With bitter blows, unlovingly
Their quarrel reconciled;
Ares hath sharp division made;
He heard the prayer their father prayed.

They have their portion ! poor, poor souls !
A little fathom-span
Of ground, illiberal fortune doles ;
No more the gods give man ;
And 'neath them lying stark and cold
Earth's wealth unplumbed, her gems and gold.

Wail for the wreath of victory
That crowns their race with woe !
Wail for the Curse's triumph-cry,
Shrieked for their overthrow !
Wail for the line that broke and fled—
And found a refuge with the dead !

There stands a trophy at the gate,
Where breast to breast they fell ;
The votive offering of Hate
And Havoc hot from hell ;
There their ill star its strength essayed,
Nor till both sank its fury stayed !

THE DIRGE.

ANTIGONE.

Smiter smitten !

ISMENE.

Slayer slain !

ANTIGONE.

Blood on thy spear !

ISMENE.

On thy breast that stain !

ANTIGONE.

Weep the wrong !

ISMENE.

Wail the woe!

ANTIGONE.

Make grief thy song!

ISMENE.

Let thy tears flow!

ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.

Misery! Ah, misery!

ANTIGONE.

Oh, maddened breast!

ISMENE.

Oh, moaning heart!

ANTIGONE.

Wept with all tears thou art!

ISMENE.

And thou of all unhappy things unhappiest!

ANTIGONE.

Slain by thine own thou liest dead!

ISMENE.

Yea, and this hand its own blood shed!

ANTIGONE.

So is a tale of grief twice told!

ISMENE.

A double horror to behold!

ANTIGONE.

Two woes in dreadful neighbourhood!

ISMENE.

They lie together mingled in their blood!

CHORUS.

O Fate! How heavy is thy hand!
How grievous are the gifts that thou dost bring!
Great shade of Œdipus who banned
His own offspring,—
Offended ghost—Erinys black as hell,
Surely thou art of might unconquerable!

ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.

Misery! ah, misery!

ANTIGONE.

Sorrow's gifts are ill to see!

ISMENE.

These back from exile thou didst bring to me!

ANTIGONE.

He fought and slew; yet home is far away!

ISMENE.

He won the cause, but perished in the fray!

ANTIGONE.

Ill he sped—for he is fled!

ISMENE.

And this poor soul is numbered with the dead!

ANTIGONE.

Bad brotherhood was this!

ISMENE.

Yea, and they had but little bliss!

ANTIGONE.

One sorrow! One death-song!

ISMENE.

Bewept with tears that weep a threefold wrong!

CHORUS.

O Fate! How heavy is thy hand!
How grievous are the gifts that thou dost bring!
Great shade of Œdipus who banned
His own offspring,—
Offended ghost—Erinys black as hell,
Surely thou art of might unconquerable!

ANTIGONE.

Now thou know'st thou didst transgress!

ISMENE.

Now thou own'st thy wickedness!

ANTIGONE.

Back returned with murderous stride!

ISMENE.

Fugitive and fratricide!

ANTIGONE.

Oh, the woeful victory!

ISMENE.

Oh, the sorry sight to see!

ANTIGONE.

Wail the grief!

ISMENE.

Weep the wrong!

ANTIGONE.

To home and country both belong!

ISMENE.

Mine the woe!

ANTIGONE.

This long anguish ends even so!

ISMENE.

Wretchedest of mortal kind!

ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.

Sinning with a frenzied mind!

ANTIGONE.

Where to lay them—in what grave?

ISMENE.

Where most honour they may have!

ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.

Yea, these children of his woe
Shall be their father's bedfellow!

Enter a HERALD.

HERALD.

Hold! Let me first discharge a duty. I
Am come with mandate from the Governors
Appointed by the people of this realm
Cadmean. Their high will and pleasure is
That, forasmuch as good Eteocles
Was loyally affected to this land,
Ye do inter him in its tender soil;
Thereby acknowledging he gave his life
For love of her and hatred of her foes;
And, being perfect and without reproach
God-ward and to the temples of his fathers,
Died, as became his youth, in guiltlessness.
Touching the said deceased Eteocles
So much I am commanded to convey.
But for his brother—Polyneices—ye
Are to cast forth unburied his remains
For dogs to gnaw; as a conspirator
Against the integrity of Cadmus' realm,

Who would have turned this kingdom upside down,
Had not a God from heaven braced yonder arm.
Outlawed in death is he, with the same ban
Wherewith the Gods attached him, when he led
An army hither to possess the land.
Therefore it seemeth good that birds of the air
Shall give him burial; and, in dishonour,
He shall have all the honour he hath earned :—
No following of slaves to build his tomb;
No keening note of ceremonial woe;
His own kin shall deny him obsequies.
This touching him is formally resolved
By the good lords that govern Cadmus Town.

ANTIGONE.

Tell your good lords that I will bury him
If none will help me. If it be dangerous
To bury mine own brother, I am ready!
Shame have I none for this rebellion!
A mighty yearning draws me; that great bond
Which binds us, sprung from the same parent's loins,
And makes us joint-heirs of their misery.
Therefore, my soul, make thou his griefs thine own,
Though he can neither hear nor answer thee,
And be a sister to the slumbering dead!
This body never hollow-bellied wolf
Shall tear and rend! So let no man 'resolve it'!
For I will scoop for him a shallow grave,
Ay, with these woman's hands! I'll fold my robe
And carry him in my lap, and cover him!
Let no 'good lords' 'resolve it' otherwise!
Courage! For what I will I'll find a way!

HERALD.

'Tis my most strict command that thou forbear!
Flout not authority!

ANTIGONE.

And it is mine
That thou refine not on thy herald's office.

HERALD.

Let me say this: a people long oppressed
When they win free, turn savage.

ANTIGONE.

Let them be
As savage as you please,—he shall have his grave.

HERALD.

And wilt thou pay the honours of the grave
To one whom the supreme authority
Holdeth accurst?

ANTIGONE.

Alas! The Gods, methinks,
Have meted out to him his meed of honour.

HERALD.

For grievous outrage on the commonweal!
He did most wickedly imperil her!

ANTIGONE.

Gave back what he received! Evil for evil!

HERALD.

To be revenged upon one man, his foe,
He struck at all!

ANTIGONE.

So might we wrangle on !
And so should wrangling still have the last word !

HERALD.

Then I have done; reck thine own rede and rue it !

[*Exit* HERALD.

CHORUS.

What sorrow like thine is !
And ye angry ghosts,
Blood-boltered Erinys,
Loud, loud are your boasts !
Race-wreckers, your feet have not tarried !
The tree-root and branch lies shattered !
The ruins of Œdipus' line
With the dust of its dead shall be scattered !
And how shall my heart incline?
On thy poor corse shall I shed no tear?
Shall I not walk before thy bier
When thou to the grave art carried?

Ah ! maugre all pity,
I am afraid !
From the wrath of the city
My soul shrinks dismayed !
New sorrow is here for my grieving !
Yea ! for there shall not fail thee
The meed of a multitude's tears !
Thou shalt have many to wail thee,
Lost in the wreck of the years !

And must this poor soul go without his moan
Save the death-song his sister singeth alone?
O bitter past believing!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What the city declareth
Be done or forborne!
Little my heart careth,—
Too deeply I mourn,—
Yea, my sorrow their anger despiseth!
Lead on! Though his people disown him
And no proud funeral pomp he shall have,
Together our hearts shall bemoan him,—
Together our hands build his grave!
For to-day goeth by as a tale that is told,
And Time metes new censure, revoking the old,
And Justice her dooms reviseth!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Go thy ways! Where my trust is
My mourning shall be!
When the stern soul of Justice
And man's censure agree,
Shall I question or shall I upbraid her?
Nay, rather my dirge shall be chanted
For him who wrought most for his land,
And the city that Cadmus planted,
Under Heaven and Zeus' mighty hand,
When she was like to be cast away,
Foundered far from the light of day
'Neath the wave of the strong invader.

[*Exeunt; one half following* ANTIGONE *with the body of* POLYNEICES, *and the other half* ISMENE *with the body of* ETEOCLES.

Prometheus Bound

Scene: *Mountainous country, and in the middle of a deep gorge a Rock, towards which* Kratos *and* Bia *carry the gigantic form of* Prometheus. Hephaestus *follows dejectedly with hammer, nails, chains, etc.*

Kratos.

Now have we journeyed to a spot of earth
Remote,—the Scythian wild, a waste untrod.
And now, Hephaestus, thou must execute
The task our father laid on thee, and fetter
This malefactor to the jagged rocks
In adamantine bonds infrangible;
For thine own blossom of all forging fire
He stole and gave to mortals; trespass grave
For which the Gods have called him to account,
That he may learn to bear Zeus' tyranny
And cease to play the lover of mankind.

Hephaestus.

Kratos and Bia, for ye twain the hest
Of Zeus is done with; nothing lets you further.
But forcibly to bind a brother God,
In chains, in this deep chasm raked by all storms
I have not courage; yet needs must I pluck
Courage from manifest necessity,
For woe worth him that slights the Father's word.
O high-souled son of Themis sage in counsel,

With heavy heart I must make thy heart heavy,
In bonds of brass not easy to be loosed,
Nailing thee to this crag where no wight dwells,
Nor sound of human voice nor shape of man
Shall visit thee; but the sun-blaze shall roast
Thy flesh; thy hue, flower-fair, shall suffer change;
Welcome will Night be when with spangled robe
She hides the light of day; welcome the sun
Returning to disperse the frosts of dawn.
And every hour shall bring its weight of woe
To wear thy heart away; for yet unborn
Is he who shall release thee from thy pain.
This is thy wage for loving humankind.
For, being a God, thou dared'st the Gods' ill will,
Preferring, to exceeding honour, Man.
Wherefore thy long watch shall be comfortless,
Stretched on this rock, never to close an eye
Or bend a knee; and vainly shalt thou lift,
With groanings deep and lamentable cries,
Thy voice; for Zeus is hard to be entreated,
As new-born power is ever pitiless.

KRATOS.

Enough! Why palter? Why waste idle pity?
Is not the God Gods loathe hateful to thee?
Traitor to man of thy prerogative?

HEPHAESTUS.

Kindred and fellowship are dreaded names.

KRATOS.

Questionless; but to slight the Father's word—
How sayest thou?—Is not this fraught with more dread?

HEPHAESTUS.

Thy heart was ever hard and overbold.

KRATOS.

But wailing will not ease him! Waste no pains
Where thy endeavour nothing profiteth.

HEPHAESTUS.

Oh execrable work! loathed handicraft!

KRATOS.

Why curse thy trade? For what thou hast to do,
Troth, smithcraft is in no wise answerable.

HEPHAESTUS.

Would that it were another's craft, not mine!

KRATOS.

Why, all things are a burden save to rule
Over the Gods; for none is free but Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS.

To that I answer not, knowing it true.

KRATOS.

Why, then, make haste to cast the chains about him,
Lest glancing down on thee the Father's eye
Behold a laggard and a loiterer.

HEPHAESTUS.

Here are the iron bracelets for his arms.

KRATOS.

Fasten them round his arms with all thy strength!
Strike with thy hammer! Nail him to the rocks!

HEPHAESTUS.

'Tis done! and would that it were done less well!

KRATOS.

Harder—I say—strike harder—screw all tight
And be not in the least particular
Remiss, for unto one of his resource
Bars are but instruments of liberty.

HEPHAESTUS.

This forearm's fast:—a shackle hard to shift.

KRATOS.

Now buckle this!—and handsomely! Let him learn
Sharp though he be, he's a dull blade to Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS.

None can find fault with this:—save him it tortures.

KRATOS.

Now take thine iron spike and drive it in,
Until it gnaw clean through the rebel's breast.

HEPHAESTUS.

Woe's me, Prometheus, for thy weight of woe!

KRATOS.

Still shirking? still a-groaning for the foes
Of Zeus? Anon thou'lt wail thine own mishap.

HEPHAESTUS.

Thou seest what eyes scarce bear to look upon!

KRATOS.

I see this fellow getting his deserts!
But strap him with a belt about his ribs.

HEPHAESTUS.

I do what I must do: for thee—less words!

KRATOS.

'Words,' quotha? Aye, and shout 'em if need be.
Come down and cast a ring-bolt round his legs.

HEPHAESTUS.

The thing is featly done;—and 'twas quick work.

KRATOS.

Now with a sound rap knock the bolt-pins home!
For heavy handed is thy task-master.

HEPHAESTUS.

So villainous a form vile tongue befits.

KRATOS.

Be thou the heart of wax, but chide not me
That I am gruffish, stubborn and stiff-willed.

HEPHAESTUS.

Oh, come away! The tackle holds him fast.

KRATOS.

Now, where thou hang'st, insult! Plunder the Gods
For creatures of a day! To thee what gift
Will mortals tender to requite thy pains?
The destinies were out miscalling thee
Designer: a designer thou wilt need
From trap so well contrived to twist thee free.

[*Exeunt.*

PROMETHEUS.

O divine air! Breezes on swift bird-wings,
Ye river fountains, and of ocean-waves
The multitudinous laughter! Mother Earth!
And thou all-seeing circle of the sun,
Behold what I, a God, from Gods endure!

Look down upon my shame,
The cruel wrong that racks my frame,
The grinding anguish that shall waste my strength,
Till time's ten thousand years have measured out their length!

He hath devised these chains,
The new throned potentate who reigns,
Chief of the chieftains of the Blest. Ah me!
The woe which is and that which yet shall be
I wail; and question make of these wide skies
When shall the star of my deliverance rise.

And yet—and yet—exactly I foresee
All that shall come to pass; no sharp surprise
Of pain shall overtake me; what's determined
Bear, as I can, I must, knowing the might
Of strong Necessity is unconquerable.
But touching my fate silence and speech alike
Are unsupportable. For boons bestowed
On mortal men I am straitened in these bonds.
I sought the fount of fire in hollow reed
Hid privily, a measureless resource
For man, and mighty teacher of all arts.
This is the crime that I must expiate
Hung here in chains, nailed 'neath the open sky.

Ha! Ha!
What echo, what odour floats by with no sound?
God-wafted or mortal or mingled its strain?
Comes there one to this world's end, this mountain-girt ground,
To have sight of my torment? Or of what is he fain?

A God ye behold in bondage and pain,
The foe of Zeus and one at feud with all
The deities that find
Submissive entry to the tyrant's hall;
His fault, too great a love of humankind.
Ah me! Ah me! what wafture nigh at hand,
As of great birds of prey, is this I hear?
The bright air fanned
Whistles and shrills with rapid beat of wings.
There cometh nought but to my spirit brings
Horror and fear.

The DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS *draw near in mid-air in their winged chariot.*

CHORUS.

Put thou all fear away!
In kindness cometh this array
On wings of speed to mountain lone,
Our sire's consent not lightly won.
But a fresh breeze our convoy brought,
For loud the din of iron raught
Even to our sea-caves cold recess,
And scared away the meek-eyed bashfulness.
I tarried not to tie my sandal shoe
But haste, post haste, through air my wingéd chariot flew.

PROMETHEUS.

Ah me! Ah me!
Fair progeny
That many-childed Tethys brought to birth,
Fathered of Ocean old
Whose sleepless stream is rolled

Round the vast shores of earth!
Look on me! Look upon these chains
Wherein I hang fast held
On rocks high-pinnacled,
My dungeon and my tower of dole,
Where o'er the abyss my soul,
Sad warder, her unwearied watch sustains!

CHORUS.

Prometheus, I am gazing on thee now!
With the cold breath of fear upon my brow,
Not without mist of dimming tears,
While to my sight thy giant stature rears
Its bulk forpined upon these savage rocks
In shameful bonds the linkéd adamant locks.
For now new steersmen take the helm
Olympian; now with little thought
Of right, on strange, new laws Zeus stablisheth his realm,
Bringing the mighty ones of old to naught.

PROMETHEUS.

Oh that he had conveyed me
'Neath earth, 'neath hell that swalloweth up the dead;
In Tartarus, illimitably vast
With adamantine fetters bound me fast,—
There his fierce anger on me visited,
Where never mocking laughter could upbraid me
Of God or aught beside!
But now a wretch enskied,
A far-seen vane,
All they that hate me triumph in my pain.

CHORUS.

Who of the Gods is there so pitiless
That he can triumph in thy sore distress?
Who doth not inly groan
With every pang of thine save Zeus alone?
But he is ever wroth,—not to be bent
From his resolved intent
The sons of heaven to subjugate;
Nor shall he cease until his heart be satiate,
Or one a way devise
To hurl him from the throne where he doth monarchize.

PROMETHEUS.

Yea, of a surety,—though he do me wrong,
Loading my limbs with fetters strong—
The president
Of heaven's high parliament
Shall need me yet to show
What new conspiracy with privy blow
Attempts his sceptre and his kingly seat.
Neither shall words with all persuasion sweet,
Not though his tongue drop honey, cheat
Nor charm my knowledge from me; nor duress
Of menace dire, fear of more grievous pains,
Unseal my lips, till he have loosed these chains,
And granted for these injuries redress.

CHORUS.

High is the heart of thee,
Thy will no whit by bitter woes unstrung,
And all too free
The licence of thy bold, unshackled tongue.
But fear hath roused my soul with piercing cry!

And for thy fate my heart misgives me! I
Tremble to know when through the breakers' roar
Thy keel shall touch again the friendly shore;
For not by prayer to Zeus is access won;
An unpersuadable heart hath Cronos' son.

PROMETHEUS.

I know the heart of Zeus is hard, that he hath tied
Justice to his side;
But he shall be full gentle thus assuaged;
And, the implacable wroth wherewith he raged
Smoothed quite away, nor he nor I
Be loth to seal a bond of peace and amity.

CHORUS.

All that thou hast to tell I pray unfold,
That we may hear at large upon what count
Zeus took thee and with bitter wrong affronts:
Instruct us, if the telling hurt thee not.

PROMETHEUS.

These things are sorrowful for me to speak,
Yet silence too is sorrow: all ways woe!
When first the Blessed Ones were filled with wrath
And there arose division in their midst,
These instant to hurl Cronos from his throne
That Zeus might be their king, and these, adverse,
Contending that he ne'er should rule the Gods,
Then I, wise counsel urging to persuade
The Titans, sons of Ouranos and Chthon,
Prevailed not: but, all indirect essays
Despising, they by the strong hand,—effortless,
Yet by main force,—supposed that they might seize
Supremacy. But me my mother Themis

And Gaia, one form called by many names,
Not once alone with voice oracular
Had prophesied how power should be disposed,—
That not by strength neither by violence
The mighty should be mastered, but by guile.
Which things by me set forth at large, they scorned,
Nor graced my motion with the least regard.
Then, of all ways that offered, I judged best,
Taking my mother with me, to support,
No backward friend, the not less cordial Zeus.
And by my politic counsel Tartarus,
The bottomless and black, old Cronos hides
With his confederates. So helped by me,
The tyrant of the Gods, such service rendered
With ignominious chastisement requites.
But 'tis a common malady of power
Tyrannical never to trust a friend.
And now, what ye inquired, for what arraigned
He shamefully entreats me, ye shall know.
When first upon his high, paternal throne
He took his seat, forthwith to divers Gods
Divers good gifts he gave, and parcelled out
His empire, but of miserable men
Recked not at all; rather it was his wish
To wipe out man and rear another race:
And these designs none contravened but me.
I risked the bold attempt, and saved mankind
From stark destruction and the road to hell.
Therefore with this sore penance am I bowed,
Grievous to suffer, pitiful to see.
But, for compassion shown to man, such fate
I no wise earned; rather in wrath's despite

Am I to be reformed, and made a show
Of infamy to Zeus.

CHORUS.

He hath a heart
Of iron, hewn out of unfeeling rock
Is he, Prometheus, whom thy sufferings
Rouse not to wrath. Would I had ne'er beheld them,
For verily the sight hath wrung my heart.

PROMETHEUS.

Yea, to my friends a woeful sight am I.

CHORUS.

Hast not more boldly in aught else transgressed?

PROMETHEUS.

I took from man expectancy of death.

CHORUS.

What medicine found'st thou for this malady?

PROMETHEUS.

I planted blind hope in the heart of him.

CHORUS.

A mighty boon thou gavest there to man.

PROMETHEUS.

Moreover, I conferred the gift of fire.

CHORUS.

And have frail mortals now the flame-bright fire?

PROMETHEUS.

Yea, and shall master many arts thereby.

CHORUS.

And Zeus with such misfeasance charging thee—

PROMETHEUS.

Torments me with extremity of woe.

CHORUS.

And is no end in prospect of thy pains?

PROMETHEUS.

None; save when he shall choose to make an end.

CHORUS.

How should he choose? What hope is thine? Dost thou
Not see that thou hast erred? But how thou erredst
Small pleasure were to me to tell; to thee
Exceeding sorrow. Let it go then: rather
Seek thou for some deliverance from thy woes.

PROMETHEUS.

He who stands free with an untrammelled foot
Is quick to counsel and exhort a friend
In trouble. But all these things I know well.
Of my free will, my own free will, I erred,
And freely do I here acknowledge it.
Freeing mankind myself have durance found.
Natheless, I looked not for sentence so dread,
High on this precipice to droop and pine,
Having no neighbour but the desolate crags.
And now lament no more the ills I suffer,
But come to earth and an attentive ear
Lend to the things that shall befall hereafter.
Harken, oh harken, suffer as I suffer!
Who knows, who knows, but on some scatheless head,
Another's, yet for the like woes reserved,
The wandering doom will presently alight?

CHORUS

Prometheus, we have heard thy call:
Not on deaf ears these awful accents fall.
Lo! lightly leaving at thy words
My flying car
And holy air, the pathway of great birds,
I long to tread this land of peak and scar,
And certify myself by tidings sure
Of all thou hast endured and must endure.

[*While the winged chariot of the* OCEANIDES *comes to ground their father* OCEANUS *enters, riding on a monster.*

OCEANUS.

Now have I traversed the unending plain
And unto thee, Prometheus, am I come,
Guiding this wingèd monster with no rein,
Nor any bit, but mind's firm masterdom.
And know that for thy grief my heart is sore;
The bond of kind, methinks, constraineth me;
Nor is there any I would honour more,
Apart from kinship, than I reverence thee.
And thou shalt learn that I speak verity:
Mine is no smooth, false tongue; for do but show
How I can serve thee, grieved and outraged thus,
Thou ne'er shalt say thou hast, come weal, come woe,
A friend more faithful than Oceanus.

PROMETHEUS.

How now? Who greets me? What! Art thou too come
To gaze upon my woes? How could'st thou leave
The stream that bears thy name, thine antres arched
With native rock, to visit earth that breeds

The massy iron in her womb? Com'st thou
To be spectator of my evil lot
And fellow sympathizer with my woes?
Behold, a thing indeed to gaze upon!
The friend of Zeus, co-stablisher of his rule,
See, by his sentence with what pains I am bowed!

OCEANUS.

Prometheus, all too plainly I behold:
And for the best would counsel thee: albeit
Thy brain is subtle. Learn to know thy heart,
And, as the times, so let thy manners change,
For by the law of change a new God rules.
But, if these bitter, savage, sharp-set words
Thou ventest, it may be, though he sit throned
Far off and high above thee, Zeus will hear;
And then thy present multitude of ills
Will seem the mild correction of a babe.
Rather, O thou much chastened one, refrain
Thine anger, and from suffering seek release.
Stale, peradventure, seem these words of mine:
Nevertheless, of a too haughty tongue
Such punishment, Prometheus, is the wage.
But thou, not yet brought low by suffering,
To what thou hast of ill would'st add far worse.
Therefore, while thou hast me for schoolmaster,
Thou shalt not kick against the pricks; the more
That an arch-despot who no audit dreads
Rules by his own rough will. And now I leave thee,
To strive with what success I may command
For thy deliv'rance. Keep a quiet mind
And use not over-vehemence of speech— .

Knowest thou not, being exceeding wise,
A wanton, idle tongue brings chastisement?

PROMETHEUS.

I marvel that thou art not in my case,
Seeing with me thou did'st adventure all.
And now, I do entreat thee, spare thyself.
Thou wilt not move him: he's not easy moved.
Take heed lest thou find trouble by the way.

OCEANUS.

Thou are a better counsellor to others
Than to thyself:—I judge by deeds not words.
Pluck me not back when I would fain set forth.
My oath upon it, Zeus will grant my prayer
And free thee from these pangs.

PROMETHEUS. I tender thee
For this my thanks and ever-during praise.
Certes, no backward friend art thou; and yet
Trouble not thyself; for at the best thy labour
Will nothing serve me,— if thou mean'st to serve.
Being thyself untrammelled stand thou fast.
For, not to mitigate my own mischance,
Would I see others hap on evil days.
The thought be far from me. I feel the weight
Of Atlas' woes, my brother, in the west
Shouldering the pillar that props heaven and earth,
No wieldy fardel for his arms to fold.
The giant dweller in Cilician dens
I saw and pitied—a terrific shape,
A hundred-headed monster—when he fell,
Resistless Typhon who withstood the Gods,
With fearsome hiss of beak-mouth horrible,

While lightning from his eyes with Gorgon-glare
Flashed for the ravage of the realm of Zeus.
But on him came the bolt that never sleeps,
Down-crashing thunder, with emitted fire,
Which shattered him and all his towering hopes
Dashed into ruin; smitten through the breast,
His strength as smoking cinder, lightning-charred.
And now a heap, a helpless, sprawling hulk,
He lies stretched out beside the narrow seas,
Pounded and crushed deep under Etna's roots.
But on the mountain-top Hephaestus sits
Forging the molten iron, whence shall burst
Rivers of fire, with red and ravening jaws
To waste fair-fruited, smooth, Sicilian fields.
Such bilious up-boiling of his ire
Shall Typho vent, with slingstone-showers red-hot,
And unapproachable surge of fiery spray,
Although combusted by the bolt of Zeus.
But thou art not unlearned, nor needest me
To be thy teacher: save thyself the way
Thou knowest and I will fortify my heart
Until the wrathfulness of Zeus abate.

OCEANUS.

Nay then, Prometheus, art thou ignorant
Words are physicians to a wrath-sick soul?

PROMETHEUS.

Yes, if with skill one soften the ripe core,
Not by rough measures make it obdurate.

OCEANUS.

Seest thou in warm affection detriment
Or aught untoward in adventuring?

PROMETHEUS.

A load of toil and a light mind withal.

OCEANUS.

Then give me leave to call that sickness mine.
Wise men accounted fools attain their ends.

PROMETHEUS.

But how if I am galled by thine offence?

OCEANUS.

There very palpably thou thrustest home.

PROMETHEUS.

Beware lest thou through pity come to broils.

OCEANUS.

With one established in Omnipotence?

PROMETHEUS.

Of him take heed lest thou find heaviness.

OCEANUS.

I am schooled by thy calamity, Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS.

Pack then! And, prithee, do not change thy mind!

OCEANUS.

Thou criest 'On' to one in haste to go.
For look, my dragon with impatient wings
Flaps at the broad, smooth road of level air.
Fain would he kneel him down in his own stall.

[*Exit* OCEANUS.

CHORUS (*after alighting*).

I mourn for thee, Prometheus, minished and brought low,
Watering my virgin cheeks with these sad drops, that flow

From sorrow's rainy fount, to fill soft-lidded eyes
With pure libations for thy fortune's obsequies.
An evil portion that none coveteth hath Zeus
Prepared for thee; by self-made laws established for his use
Disposing all, the elder Gods he purposeth to show
How strong is that right arm wherewith he smites a foe.
There hath gone up a cry from earth, a groaning for the fall
Of things of old renown and shapes majestical,
And for thy passing an exceeding bitter groan;
For thee and for thy brother Gods whose honour was thine own:
These things all they who dwell in Asia's holy seat,
Time's minions, mourn and with their groans thy groans repeat.
Yea, and they mourn who dwell beside the Colchian shore,
The hero maids unwedded that delight in war,
And Scythia's swarming myriads who their dwelling make
Around the borders of the world, the salt Mæotian lake.
Mourns Ares' stock, that flowers in desert Araby,
And the strong city mourns, the hill-fort planted high,
Near neighbour to huge Caucasus, dread mountaineers
That love the clash of arms, the counter of sharp spears.
Beforetime of all Gods one have I seen in pain,
One only Titan bound with adamantine chain,
Atlas in strength supreme, who groaning stoops, down-bent
Under the burthen of the earth and heaven's broad firmament.

Bellows the main of waters, surge with foam-seethed surge
Clashing tumultuous; for thee the deep seas chant their dirge;
And Hell's dark under-world a hollow moaning fills;
Thee mourn the sacred streams with all their fountain-rills.

PROMETHEUS.

Think not that I for pride and stubbornness
Am silent: rather is my heart the prey
Of gnawing thoughts, both for the past, and now
Seeing myself by vengeance buffeted.
For to these younger Gods their precedence
Who severally determined if not I?
No more of that: I should but weary you
With things ye know; but listen to the tale
Of human sufferings, and how at first
Senseless as beasts I gave men sense, possessed them
Of mind. I speak not in contempt of man;
I do but tell of good gifts I conferred.
In the beginning, seeing they saw amiss,
And hearing heard not, but, like phantoms huddled
In dreams, the perplexed story of their days
Confounded; knowing neither timber-work
Nor brick-built dwellings basking in the light,
But dug for themselves holes, wherein like ants,
That hardly may contend against a breath,
They dwelt in burrows of their unsunned caves.
Neither of winter's cold had they fix'd sign,
Nor of the spring when she comes decked with flowers,
Nor yet of summer's heat with melting fruits
Sure token: but utterly without knowledge

Moiled, until I the rising of the stars
Showed them, and when they set, though much obscure.
Moreover, number, the most excellent
Of all inventions, I for them devised,
And gave them writing that retaineth all,
The serviceable mother of the Muse.
I was the first that yoked unmanaged beasts,
To serve as slaves with collar and with pack,
And take upon themselves, to man's relief,
The heaviest labour of his hands: and I
Tamed to the rein and drove in wheeled cars
The horse, of sumptuous pride the ornament.
And those sea-wanderers with the wings of cloth,
The shipman's waggons, none but me devised.
These manifold inventions for mankind
I perfected, who, out upon't, have none,—
No, not one shift—to rid me of this shame.

CHORUS.

Thy sufferings have been shameful, and thy mind
Strays at a loss: like to a bad physician
Fallen sick, thou'rt out of heart: nor cans't prescribe
For thine own case the draught to make thee sound.

PROMETHEUS.

But hear the sequel and the more admire
What arts, what aids I cleverly evolved.
The chiefest that, if any man fell sick,
There was no help for him, comestible,
Lotion or potion; but for lack of drugs
They dwindled quite away; until I taught them
To compound draughts and mixtures sanative,

Wherewith they now are armed against disease.
I staked the winding path of divination
And was the first distinguisher of dreams,
The true from false; and voices ominous
Of meaning dark interpreted; and tokens
Seen when men take the road; and augury
By flight of all the greater crook-clawed birds
With nice discrimination I defined;
These, by their nature fair and favourable,
Those, flattered with fair name. And of each sort
The habits I described; their mutual feuds
And friendships and the assemblages they hold.
And of the plumpness of the inward parts
What colour is acceptable to the Gods,
The well-streaked liver-lobe and gall-bladder.
Also by roasting limbs well wrapped in fat
And the long chine, I led men on the road
Of dark and riddling knowledge; and I purged
The glancing eye of fire, dim before,
And made its meaning plain. These are my works.
Then, things beneath the earth, aids hid from man,
Brass, iron, silver, gold, who dares to say
He was before me in discovering?
None, I wot well, unless he loves to babble.
And in a single word to sum the whole,—
All manner of arts men from Prometheus learned.

CHORUS.

Shoot not beyond the mark in succouring man
While thou thyself art comfortless: for I
Am of good hope that from these bonds escaped
Thou shalt one day be mightier than Zeus.

PROMETHEUS.

Fate, that brings all things to an end, not thus
Apportioneth my lot: ten thousand pangs
Must bow, ten thousand miseries afflict me
Ere from these bonds I freedom find, for Art
Is by much weaker than Necessity.

CHORUS.

Who is the pilot of Necessity?

PROMETHEUS.

The Fates triform, and the unforgetting Furies.

CHORUS.

So then Zeus is of lesser might than these?

PROMETHEUS.

Surely he shall not shun the lot apportioned.

CHORUS.

What lot for Zeus save world-without-end reign?

PROMETHEUS.

Tax me no further with importunate questions.

CHORUS.

O deep the mystery thou shroudest there!

PROMETHEUS.

Of aught but this freely thou may'st discourse;
But touching this I charge thee speak no word;
Nay, veil it utterly: for strictly kept
The secret from these bonds shall set me free.

CHORUS.

May Zeus who all things swayeth
Ne'er wreak the might none stayeth
On wayward will of mine;
May I stint not nor waver

With offerings of sweet savour
And feasts of slaughtered kine;
The holy to the holy,
With frequent feet and lowly
At altar, fane and shrine,
Over the Ocean marches,
The deep that no drought parches,
Draw near to the divine.
My tongue the Gods estrange not;
My firm set purpose change not,
As wax melts in fire-shine.
Sweet is the life that lengthens,
While joyous hope still strengthens,
And glad, bright thoughts sustain;
But shuddering I behold thee,
The sorrows that enfold thee
And all thine endless pain.
For Zeus thou hast despisèd;
Thy fearless heart misprizèd
All that his vengeance can,
Thy wayward will obeying,
Excess of honour paying,
Prometheus, unto man.

And, oh, belovèd, for this graceless grace
What thanks? What prowess for thy bold essay
Shall champion thee from men of mortal race,
The petty insects of a passing day?
Saw'st not how puny is the strength they spend?
With few, faint steps walking as dreams and blind,
Nor can the utmost of their lore transcend
The harmony of the Eternal Mind.
These things I learned seeing thy glory dimmed,

Prometheus. Ah, not thus on me was shed
The rapture of sweet music, when I hymned
The marriage-song round bath and bridal bed
At thine espousals, and of thy blood-kin,
A bride thou chosest, wooing her to thee
With all good gifts that may a Goddess win,
Thy father's child, divine Hesione.

Enter Io, *crazed and horned.*

Io.

What land is this? What people here abide?
And who is he,
The prisoner of this windswept mountain-side?
Speak, speak to me;
Tell me, poor caitiff, how did'st thou transgress,
Thus buffeted?
Whither am I, half-dead with weariness,
For-wanderèd?
Ha! Ha!
Again the prick, the stab of gadfly-sting!
O earth, earth, hide,
The hollow shape—Argus—that evil thing—
The hundred-eyed-
Earth-born-herdsman! I see him yet; he stalks
With stealthy pace,
And crafty watch not all my poor wit baulks!
From the deep place
Of earth that hath his bones he breaketh bound,
And from the pale
Of Death, the Underworld, a hell-sent hound
On the blood-trail,

Fasting and faint he drives me on before,
With spectral hand,
Along the windings of the wasteful shore,
The salt sea-sand!
List! List! the pipe! how drowzily it shrills!
A cricket-cry!
See! See! the wax-webbed reeds! Oh, to these ills
Ye Gods on high,
Ye blessed Gods, what bourne? O wandering feet
When will ye rest?
O Cronian child, wherein by aught unmeet
Have I transgressed
To be yoke-fellow with Calamity?
My mind unstrung,
A crack-brained lack-wit, frantic mad am I,
By gad-fly stung,
Thy scourge, that tarres me on with buzzing wing!
Plunge me in fire,—
Hide me in earth,—to deep-sea-monsters fling,—
But my desire—
Kneeling I pray—grudge not to grant, O King!
Too long a race
Stripped for the course have I run to and fro;
And still I chase
The vanishing goal, the end of all my woe;
Enough have I mourned!
Hear'st thou the lowing of the maid cow-horned?

PROMETHEUS.

How should I hear thee not? Thou art the child
Of Inachus, dazed with the dizzying fly.
The heart of Zeus thou hast made hot with love

And Hera's curse even as a runner stripped
Pursues thee ever on thine endless round.

Io.

How dost thou know my father's name? Impart
To one like thee
A poor, distressful creature, who thou art.
Sorrow with me,
Sorrowful one! Tell me, whose voice proclaims
Things true and sad,
Naming by all their old, unhappy names,
What drove me mad—
Sick, Sick,—ye Gods,—with suffering ye have sent,
That clings and clings,—
Wasting my lamp of life till it be spent!—
Crazed with your stings!
Famished I come with trampling and with leaping,
Torment and shame,
To Hera's cruel wrath, her craft unsleeping,
Captive and tame!
Of all wights woe-begone and fortune-crossed,
Oh, in the storm
Of the world's sorrow is there one so lost?
Speak, godlike form,
And be in this dark world my oracle!
Can'st thou not sift
The things to come? Hast thou no art to tell
What subtle shift,
Or sound of charming song shall make me well?
Hide naught of ill!
But—if indeed thou knowest—prophecy—
In words that thrill

Clear-toned through air—what such a wretch as I
Must yet abide,—
The lost, lost maid that roams earth's kingdoms wide?

PROMETHEUS.

What thou wouldst learn I will make clear to thee,
Not weaving subtleties, but simple sooth
Unfolding as the mouth should speak to friends.
I am Prometheus, giver of fire to mortals.

Io.

Oh universal succour of mankind,
Sorrowful Prometheus, why art thou punished thus?

PROMETHEUS.

I have but now ceased mourning for my griefs.

Io.

Wilt thou not grant me then so small a boon?

PROMETHEUS.

What is it thou dost ask? Thou shalt know all.

Io.

Declare to me who chained thee in this gorge.

PROMETHEUS.

The hest of Zeus, but 'twas Hephæstus' hand.

Io.

But what transgression dost thou expiate?

PROMETHEUS.

Let this suffice thee: thou shalt know no more.

Io.

Nay, but the end of my long wandering
When shall it be? This too thou must declare.

PROMETHEUS.

That it is better for thee not to know.

IO.

Oh hide not from me what I have to suffer!

PROMETHEUS.

Poor child! Poor child! I do not grudge the gift.

IO.

Why, then, art thou so slow to tell me all?

PROMETHEUS.

It is not from unkindness; but I fear
'Twill break thy heart.

IO.

Take thou no thought for me
Where thinking thwarteth heart's desire!

PROMETHEUS. So keen
To know thy sorrows! List! and thou shalt learn.

CHORUS.

Not till thou hast indulged a wish of mine.
First let us hear the story of her grief
And she herself shall tell the woeful tale.
After, thy wisdom shall impart to her
The conflict yet to come.

PROMETHEUS.

So be it, then.
And, Io, thus much courtesy thou owest
These maidens, being thine own father's kin.
For with a moving story of our woes
To win a tear from weeping auditors
In nought demeans the teller.

Io.

I know not
How fitly to refuse; and at your wish
All ye desire to know I will in plain,
Round terms set forth. And yet the telling of it
Harrows my soul; this winter's tale of wrong,
Of angry Gods and brute deformity,
And how and why on me these horrors swooped.
Always there were dreams visiting by night
The woman's chambers where I slept; and they
With flattering words admonished and cajoled me,
Saying, 'O lucky one, so long a maid?
And what a match for thee if thou would'st wed!
Why, pretty, here is Zeus as hot as hot—
Love-sick—to have thee! Such a bolt as thou
Hast shot clean through his heart! And he won't rest
Till Cypris help him win thee! Lift not then,
My daughter, a proud foot to spurn the bed
Of Zeus: but get thee gone to meadow deep
By Lerna's marsh, where are thy father's flocks
And cattle-folds, that on the eye of Zeus
May fall the balm that shall assuage desire.'
Such dreams oppressed me, troubling all my nights,
Woe's me! till I plucked courage up to tell
My father of these fears that walked in darkness.
And many times to Pytho and Dodona
He sent his sacred missioners, to inquire
How, or by deed or word, he might conform
To the high will and pleasure of the Gods.
And they returned with slippery oracles,
Nought plain, but all to baffle and perplex—

And then at last to Inachus there raught
A saying that flashed clear; the drift, that I
Must be put out from home and country, forced
To be a wanderer at the ends of the earth,
A thing devote and dedicate; and if
I would not, there should fall a thunderbolt
From Zeus, with blinding flash, and utterly
Destroy my race. So spake the oracle
Of Loxias. In sorrow he obeyed,
And from beneath his roof drove forth his child
Grieving as he grieved, and from house and home
Bolted and barred me out. But the high hand
Of Zeus bear hardly on the rein of fate.
And, instantly—even in a moment—mind
And body suffered strange distortion. Horned
Even as ye see me now, and with sharp bite
Of gadfly pricked, with high-flung skip, stark-mad,
I bounded, galloping headlong on, until
I came to the sweet waters of the stream
Kerchneian, hard by Lerna's spring. And thither
Argus, the giant herdsman, fierce and fell
As a strong wine unmixed, with hateful cast
Of all his cunning eyes upon the trail,
Gave chase and tracked me down. And there he perished
By violent and sudden doom surprised.
But I with darting sting—the scorpion whip
Of angry Gods—am lashed from land to land.
Thou hast my story, and, if thou can'st tell
What I have still to suffer, speak; but do not
Moved by compassion with a lying tale
Warm my cold heart; no sickness of the soul
Is half so shameful as composèd falsehoods.

CHORUS.

Off! lost one! off! Horror, I cry!
Horror and misery!
Was this the traveller's tale I craved to hear?
Oh, that mine eyes should see
A sight so ill to look upon! Ah me!
Sorrow, defilement, haunting fear,
Fan my blood cold,
Stabbed with a two-edged sting!
O Fate, Fate, Fate, tremblingly I behold
The plight of Io, thine apportioning!

PROMETHEUS.

Thou dost lament too soon, and art as one
All fear. Refrain thyself till thou hast heard
What's yet to be.

CHORUS.

Speak and be our instructor:
There is a kind of balm to the sick soul
In certain knowledge of the grief to come.

PROMETHEUS.

Your former wish I lightly granted ye:
And ye have heard, even as ye desired,
From this maid's lips the story of her sorrow.
Now hear the sequel, the ensuing woes
The damsel must endure from Hera's hate.
And thou, O seed of Inachæan loins,
Weigh well my words, that thou may'st understand
Thy journey's end. First towards the rising sun
Turn hence, and traverse fields that ne'er felt plough
Until thou reach the country of the Scyths,
A race of wanderers handling the long-bow

That shoots afar, and having their habitations
Under the open sky in wattled cotes
That move on wheels. Go not thou nigh to them,
But ever within sound of the breaking waves
Pass through their land. And on the left of thee
The Chalybes, workers in iron, dwell.
Beware of them, for they are savages,
Who suffer not a stranger to come near.
And thou shalt reach the river Hybristes,
Well named. Cross not, for it is ill to cross,
Until thou come even unto Caucasus,
Highest of mountains, where the foaming river
Blows all its volume from the summit ridge
That o'ertops all. And that star-neighboured ridge
Thy feet must climb; and, following the road
That runneth south, thou presently shall reach
The Amazonian hosts that loathe the male,
And shall one day remove from thence and found
Themiscyra hard by Thermodon's stream,
Where on the craggy Salmadessian coast
Waves gnash their teeth, the maw of mariners
And step-mother of ships. And they shall lead thee
Upon thy way, and with a right good will.
Then shalt thou come to the Cimmerian Isthmus,
Even at the pass and portals of the sea,
And leaving it behind thee, stout of heart,
Cross o'er the channel of Mæotis' Lake.
For ever famous among men shall be
The story of thy crossing, and the strait
Be called by a new name, the Bosporus,
In memory of thee. Then having left
Europa's soil behind thee thou shalt come

To the main land of Asia. What think ye?
Is not the only ruler of the Gods
A complete tyrant, violent to all,
Respecting none? First, being himself a God,
He burneth to enjoy a mortal maid,
And then torments her with these wanderings.
A sorry suitor for thy love, poor girl,
A bitter wooing. Yet having heard so much
Thou art not even in the overture
And prelude of the song.

Io. Alas! Oh! Oh!

Prometheus.

Thou dost cry out, fetching again deep groans:
What wilt thou do when thou hast heard in full
The evils yet to come?

Chorus.

And wilt thou tell
The maiden something further: some fresh sorrow?

Prometheus.

A stormy sea of wrong and ruining.

Io.

What does it profit me to live! Oh, why
Do I not throw myself from this rough crag
And in one leap rid me of all my pain?
Better to die at once than live, and all
My days be evil.

Prometheus.

Thou would'st find it hard
To bear what I must bear: for unto me
It is not given to die,—a dear release

From pain; but now of suffering there is
No end in sight till Zeus shall fall.

Io.

And shall
Zeus fall? His power be taken from him?—
No matter when if true—

Prometheus.

'Twould make thee happy
Methinks, if thou could'st see calamity
Whelm him.

Io.

How should it not when all my woes
Are of his sending?

Prometheus.

Well, then, thou may'st learn how
These things shall be.

Io.

Oh, who will snatch away
The tyrant's rod?

Prometheus.

Himself by his own vain
And fond imaginings.

Io.

But how? Oh, speak,—
If the declaring draw no evil down!

Prometheus.

A marriage he shall make shall vex him sore.

Io.

A marriage? Whether of gods or mortals? Speak!
If this be utterable!

PROMETHEUS.

Why dost thou ask
What I may not declare?

IO. And shall he quit
The throne of all the worlds, by a new spouse
Supplanted?

PROMETHEUS.

She will bear to him a child,
And he shall be in might more excellent
Than his progenitor.

IO.

And he will find
No way to parry this strong stroke of fate?

PROMETHEUS.

None save my own self—when these bonds are loosed.

IO.

And who shall loose them if Zeus wills not?

PROMETHEUS.

One
Of thine own seed.

IO.

How say'st thou? Shall a child
Of mine release thee?

PROMETHEUS.

Son of thine, but son
The thirteenth generation shall beget.

IO.

A prophecy oracularly dark.

PROMETHEUS.

Then seek not thou to know thine own fate.

Io.

Nay,
Tender me not a boon to snatch it from me.

Prometheus.

Of two gifts thou hast asked one shall be thine.

Io.

What gifts? Pronounce and leave to me the choice.

Prometheus.

Nay, thou are free to choose. Say, therefore, whether
I shall declare to thee thy future woes
Or him who shall be my deliverer.

Chorus.

Nay, but let both be granted! Unto her
That which she chooseth, unto me my choice,
That I, too, may have honour from thy lips.
First unto her declare her wanderings,
And unto me him who shall set thee free;
'Tis that I long to know.

Prometheus.

I will resist
No further, but to your importunacy
All things which ye desire to learn reveal.
And, Io, first to thee I will declare
Thy far-driven wanderings; write thou my words
In the retentive tablets of thy heart.
When thou hast crossed the flood that flows between
And is the boundary of two continents,
Turn to the sun's uprising, where he treads
Printing with fiery steps the eastern sky,
And from the roaring of the Pontic surge

Do thou pass on, until before thee lies
The Gorgonean plain, Kisthene called,
Where dwell the gray-haired three, the Phorcides,
Old, mumbling maids, swan-shaped, having one eye
Betwixt the three, and but a single tooth.
On them the sun with his bright beams ne'er glanceth
Nor moon that lamps the night. Not far from them
The sisters three, the Gorgons, have their haunt;
Winged forms, with snaky locks, hateful to man,
Whom nothing mortal looking on can live.
Thus much that thou may'st have a care of these.
Now of another portent thou shalt hear.
Beware the dogs of Zeus that ne'er give tongue,
The sharp-beaked gryphons, and the one-eyed horde
Of Arimaspians, riding upon horses,
Who dwell around the river rolling gold,
The ferry and the frith of Pluto's port.
Go not thou nigh them. After thou shalt come
To a far land,—a dark skinned race, that dwell
Beside the fountains of the sun, whence flows
The river Æthiops: follow its banks
Until thou comest to the steep-down slope
Where from the Bibline mountains Nilus old
Pours the sweet waters of his holy stream.
And thou, the river guiding thee, shalt come
To the three-sided, wedge-shaped land of Nile,
Where for thyself, Io, and for thy children
Long sojourn is appointed. If in aught
My story seems to stammer and to err
From indirectness, ask and ask again
Till all be manifest. I do not lack
For leisure, having more than well contents me!

CHORUS.

If there be aught that she must suffer yet,
Or aught omitted in the narrative
Of her long wanderings, I pray thee speak.
But if thou hast told all, then grant the boon
We asked and doubtless thou wilt call to mind.

PROMETHEUS.

Nay, she has heard the last of her long journey.
But, as some warrant for her patient hearing
I will relate her former sufferings
Ere she came hither. Much I will omit
That had detained us else with long discourse
And touch at once her journey's thus far goal.
When thou wast come to the Molossian plain
That lies about the high top of Dodona,
Where is an oracle and shrine of Zeus
Thesprotian, and—portent past belief—
The talking oaks,—the same from whom the word
Flashed clear and nothing questionably hailed thee
The destined spouse—ah! do I touch old wounds?—
Of Zeus, honoured above thy sex; stung thence
In torment, where the road runs by the sea,
Thou cam'st to the broad gulf of Rhea, whence
Beat back by a strong wind, thou didst retrace
Most painfully thy course; and it shall be
That times to come in memory of thy passage
Shall call that inlet the Ionian Sea.
Thus much for thee in witness that my mind
Beholdeth more than that which leaps to light.
Now for the things to come; what I shall say
Concerns ye both alike. Return we then
And follow our old track. There is a city

Yclept Canobus, built at the land's end,
Even at the mouth and mounded silt of Nile,
And there shall Zeus restore to thee thy mind
With touch benign and laying on of hands.
And from that touch thou shalt conceive and bear
Swarth Epaphus, touch-born; and he shall reap
As much of earth as Nilus watereth
With his broad-flowing river. In descent
The fifth from him there shall come back to Argos,
Thine ancient home, but driven by hard hap,
Two score and ten maids, daughters of one house,
Fleeing pollution of unlawful marriage
With their next kin, who winged with wild desire,
As hawks that follow hard on cushat-doves
Shall harry prey which they should not pursue
And hunt forbidden brides. But God shall be
Exceeding jealous for their chastity;
And old Pelasgia, for the mortal thrust
Of woman's hands and midnight murder done
Upon their new-wed lords, shall shelter them;
For every wife shall strike her husband down
Dipping a two-edged broadsword in his blood.
Oh, that mine enemies might wed such wives!
But of the fifty, one alone desire
Shall tame, as with the stroke of charming-wand,
So that she shall not lift her hands to slay
The partner of her bed; yea, melting love
Shall blunt her sharp-set will, and she shall choose
Rather to be called weak and womanly
Than the dark stain of blood; and she shall be
Mother of kings in Argos. 'Tis a tale
Were't told in full, would occupy us long.
For, of her sowing, there shall spring to fame

The lion's whelp, the archer bold, whose bow
Shall set me free. This is the oracle
Themis, my ancient Mother, Titan-born,
Disclosed to me; but how and in what wise
Were long to tell, nor would it profit thee.

Io.

Again they come, again
The fury and the pain!
The gangrened wound! The ache of pulses dinned
With raging throes!
It beats upon my brain—the burning wind
That madness blows!
It pricks—the barb, the hook not forged with heat,
The gadfly dart!
Against my ribs with thud of trampling feet
Hammers my heart!
And like a bowling wheel mine eyeballs spin,
And I am flung
By fierce winds from my course, nor can rein in
My frantic tongue
That raves I know not what!—a random tide
Of words—a froth
Of muddied waters buffeting the wide,
High-crested, hateful wave of ruin and God's wrath!

[*Exit raving.*

Chorus.

I hold him wise who first in his own mind
This canon fixed and taught it to mankind:—
True marriage is the union that mates
Equal with equal; not where wealth emasculates,
Or mighty lineage is magnified,
Should he who earns his bread look for a bride.

Therefore, grave mistresses of fate, I pray
That I may never live to see the day
When Zeus takes me for his bedfellow; or I
Draw near in love to husband from on high.
For I am full of fear when I behold
Io, the maid no human love may fold,
And her virginity disconsolate,
Homeless and husbandless by Hera's hate.
For me, when love is level, fear is far.
May none of all the Gods that greater are
Eye me with his unshunnable regard;
For in that warfare victory is hard,
And of that plenty cometh emptiness.
What should befall me then I dare not guess;
Nor whither I should flee that I might shun
The craft and subtlety of Cronos' Son.

PROMETHEUS.

I tell thee that the self-willed pride of Zeus
Shall surely be abased; that even now
He plots a marriage that shall hurl him forth
Far out of sight of his imperial throne
And kingly dignity. Then, in that hour,
Shall be fulfilled, nor in one tittle fail,
The curse wherewith his father Cronos cursed him,
What time he fell from his majestic place
Established from of old. And such a stroke
None of the Gods save me could turn aside.
I know these things shall be and on what wise.
Therefore let him secure him in his seat,
And put his trust in airy noise, and swing
His bright, two-handed, blazing thunderbolt,
For these shall nothing stead him, nor avert

Fall insupportable and glory humbled.
A wrestler of such might he maketh ready
For his own ruin; yea, a wonder, strong
In strength unmatchable; and he shall find
Fire that shall set at naught the burning bolt
And blasts more dreadful that o'er-crow the thunder.
The pestilence that scourgeth the deep seas
And shaketh solid earth, the three-pronged mace,
Poseidon's spear, a mightier shall scatter;
And when he stumbleth striking there his foot,
Fallen on evil days, the tyrant's pride
Shall measure all the miserable length
That parts rule absolute from servitude.

CHORUS.

Methinks the wish is father to the thought
And whets thy railing tongue.

PROMETHEUS.

Not so: the wish
And the accomplishment go hand in hand.

CHORUS.

Then must we look for one who shall supplant
And reign instead of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS. Calamity
Far, far more grievous shall bow down his neck.

CHORUS.

Hast thou no fear venting such blasphemy?

PROMETHEUS.

What should I fear who have no part nor lot
In doom of dying?

CHORUS.

But he might afflict thee

With agony more dreadful, pain beyond
These pains.

PROMETHEUS.

Why let him if he will!
All evils I foreknow.

CHORUS. Ah, they are wise
Who do obeisance, prostrate in the dust,
To the implacable, eternal Will.

PROMETHEUS.

Go thou and worship; fold thy hands in prayer,
And be the dog that licks the foot of power!
Nothing care I for Zeus; yea, less than naught!
Let him do what he will, and sway the world
His little hour; he has not long to lord it
Among the Gods.
Oh! here his runner comes!
The upstart tyrant's lacquey! He'll bring news,
A message, never doubt it, from his master.

Enter HERMES.

HERMES.

You, the sophistical rogue, the heart of gall,
The renegade of heaven,—to short-lived men
Purveyor of prerogatives and titles,—
Fire-thief! Dost hear me? I've a word for thee.
Thou'rt to declare,—this is the Father's pleasure—
These marriage-feasts of thine, whereof thy tongue
Rattles a-pace, and by the which his greatness
Shall take a fall. And look you rede no riddles,
But tell the truth, in each particular
Exact. I am not to sweat for thee, Prometheus,
Upon a double journey. And thou seest
Zeus by thy dark defiance is not moved.

PROMETHEUS.

A very solemn piece of insolence
Spoken like an underling of the Gods! Ye are young!
Ye are young! New come to power! And ye suppose
Your towered citadel Calamity
Can never enter! Ah, and have not I
Seen from those pinnacles the two-fold fall
Of tyrants? And the third, who his brief 'now'
Of lordship arrogates, I shall see yet
By lapse most swift, most ignominious,
Sink to perdition. And dost thou suppose
I crouch and cower in reverence and awe
To Gods of yesterday? I fail of that
So much, the total all of space and time
Bulks in between. Take thyself hence and count
Thy toiling steps back by the way thou camest,
In nothing wiser for thy questionings.

HERMES.

This is that former stubborness of thine
That brought thee hither to foul anchorage.

PROMETHEUS.

Mistake me not; I would not, if I might,
Change my misfortunes for thy vassalage.

HERMES.

Oh! better be the vassal of this rock
Than born the trusty messenger of Zeus!

PROMETHEUS.

I answer insolence, as it deserves,
With insolence. How else should it be answered?

HERMES.

Surely;—and, being in trouble, it is plain
You revel in your plight.

PROMETHEUS.

Revel, forsooth!
I would my enemies might hold such revels
And thou amongst the first.

HERMES.

Dost thou blame me
For thy misfortunes?

PROMETHEUS.

I hate all the Gods,
Because, having received good at my hands,
They have rewarded me with evil.

HERMES. This
Proves thee stark mad!

PROMETHEUS.

Mad as you please, if hating
Your enemies is madness.

CHORUS.

Were all well
With thee, thou'dst be insufferable!

PROMETHEUS.

Alas!

HERMES.

Alas, that Zeus knows not that word, Alas!

PROMETHEUS.

But ageing Time teacheth all knowledge.

HERMES. Time
Hath not yet taught thy rash, imperious will
Over wild impulse to win mastery.

PROMETHEUS.

Nay: had Time taught me that, I had not stooped
To bandy words with such a slave as thou.

CHORUS.

This, then, is all thine answer; thou'lt not speak
One syllable of what our Father asks.

PROMETHEUS.

Oh, that I were a debtor to his kindness!
I would requite him to the uttermost!

HERMES.

A cutting speech! You take me for a boy
Whom you may taunt and tease.

PROMETHEUS.

Why art thou not
A boy—a very booby—to suppose
Thou wilt get aught from me? There is no wrong
However shameful, nor no shift of malice
Whereby Zeus shall persuade me to unlock
My lips until these shackles be cast loose.
Therefore let lightning leap with smoke and flame,
And all that is be beat and tossed together,
With whirl of feathery snowflakes and loud crack
Of subterranean thunder; none of these
Shall bend my will or force me to disclose
By whom 'tis fated he shall fall from power.

HERMES.

What good can come of this? Think yet again!

PROMETHEUS.

I long ago have thought and long ago
Determined.

HERMES.

Patience! patience! thou rash fool!
Have so much patience as to school thy mind
To a right judgment in thy present troubles.

PROMETHEUS.

Lo, I am rockfast, and thy words are waves
That weary me in vain. Let not the thought
Enter thy mind, that I in awe of Zeus
Shall change my nature for a girl's, or beg
The Loathed beyond all loathing—with my hands
Spread out in woman's fashion—to cast loose
These bonds; from that I am utterly removed.

HERMES.

I have talked much, yet further not my purpose;
For thou art in no whit melted or moved
By my prolonged entreaties: like a colt
New to the harness thou dost back and plunge,
Snap at thy bit and fight against the rein.
And yet thy confidence is in a straw;
For stubborness, if one be in the wrong,
Is in itself weaker than naught at all.
See now, if thou wilt not obey my words,
What storm, what triple-crested wave of woe
Unshunnable shall come upon thee. First,
This rocky chasm shall the Father split
With earthquake thunder and his burning bolt,
And he shall hide thy form, and thou shalt hang
Bolt upright, dandled in the rock's rude arms.
Nor till thou hast completed thy long term
Shalt thou come back into the light; and then
The winged hound of Zeus, the tawny eagle,
Shall violently fall upon thy flesh
And rend it as 'twere rags; and every day

And all day long shall thine unbidden guest
Sit at thy table, feasting on thy liver
Till he hath gnawn it black. Look for no term
To such an agony till there stand forth
Among the Gods one who shall take upon him
Thy sufferings and consent to enter hell
Far from the light of Sun, yea, the deep pit
And mirk of Tartarus, for thee. Be advised;
This is no stuffed speech framed to frighten thee
But woeful truth. For Zeus knows not to lie
And every word of his shall be fulfilled.
Look sharply to thyself then: weigh my words
And do not in thy folly think self-will
Better than prudent counsel.

CHORUS.

To our mind
The words of Hermes fail not of the mark.
For he enjoins thee to let self-will go
And follow after prudent counsels. Him
Harken; for error in the wise is shame.

PROMETHEUS.

These are stale tidings I foreknew;
Therefore, since suffering is the due
A foe must pay his foes,
Let curléd lightnings clasp and clash
And close upon my limbs: loud crash
The thunder, and fierce throes
Of savage winds convulse calm air:
The embowelled blast earth's roots uptear
And toss beyond its bars ,
The rough surge, till the roaring deep
In one devouring deluge sweep
The pathway of the stars!

Finally, let him fling my form
Down whirling gulfs, the central storm
Of being; let me lie
Plunged in the black Tartarean gloom;
Yet—yet—his sentence shall not doom
This deathless self to die!

HERMES.

These are the workings of a brain
More than a little touched; the vein
Of voluble ecstasy!
Surely he wandereth from the way,
His reason lost, who thus can pray!
A mouthing madman he!
Therefore, O ye who court his fate,
Rash mourners,—ere it be too late
And ye indeed are sad
For vengeance spurring hither fast,—
Hence! lest the bellowing thunderblast
Like him should strike you mad!

CHORUS.

Words which might work persuasion speak
If thou must counsel me; nor seek
Thus, like a stream in spate,
To uproot mine honour. Dost thou dare
Urge me to baseness! I will bear
With him all blows of fate;
For false forsakers I despise;
At treachery my gorge doth rise: —
I spew it forth with hate!

HERMES.

Only,—with ruin on your track,—
Rail not at fortune; but look back

And these my words recall;
Neither blame Zeus that he hath sent
Sorrow no warning word forewent!
Ye labour for your fall
With your own hands! Not by surprise
Nor yet by stealth, but with clear eyes,
Knowing the thing ye do,
Ye walk into the yawning net
That for the feet of fools is set
And Ruin spreads for you. [*Exit.*

PROMETHEUS.

The time is past for words; earth quakes
Sensibly: hark! pent thunder rakes
The depths, with bellowing din
Of echoes rolling ever nigher:
Lightnings shake out their locks of fire;
The dust cones dance and spin;
The skipping winds, as if possessed
By faction—north, south, east and west,
Puff at each other; sea
And sky are shook together: Lo!
The swing and fury of the blow
Wherewith Zeus smiteth me
Sweepeth apace, and, visibly,
To strike my heart with fear. See, see,
Earth, awful Mother! Air,
That shedd'st from the revolving sky
On all the light they see thee by,
What bitter wrongs I bear!

The scene closes with earthquake and thunder, in the midst of which PROMETHEUS *and the* DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS *sink into the abyss.*

PA 3827.A27
Four plays of cen
3 0081 001 631 435